

DETERMINING POTENTIAL IN THE ARMY'S OFFICER CORPS:
LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO MANAGE AND PROMOTE
ACTIVE DUTY CAPTAINS BASED ON MERIT

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

DETERMINING POTENTIAL IN THE ARMY'S OFFICER CORPS: LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO MANAGE AND PROMOTE ACTIVE DUTY CAPTAINS BASED ON MERIT, by Major Ross Carlos Pixler, 134 pages.

Most active duty Army officers do not trust the current officer promotion and evaluation system, which is perceived as negatively impacting the retention of talented leaders. A common perception of the current active-duty Army promotion evaluation system is that it does not promote objectively and merit-based Captains with the greatest amount of potential. Furthermore, the Army will continue to stifle trust, motivation, and willingness for successful leaders to stay in and serve by continuing its current method of talent management. This study suggests that an objective, merit-based automated evaluation system can be implemented to overcome the current problems, improve effectiveness of talent management, and self-regulate to eventually identify the most significant characteristics common to successful leaders by branch, rank, position, and more importantly, by duty position.

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ACRONYMS

AAR	After Action Report
ACOM	Above Center of Mass
AER	Academic Evaluation Report
AIM2	Assignment Interactive Module 2
APFT	Army Physical Fitness Test
AR	Army Regulation
ARCIC	Army Capabilities Integration Center
AZ	Above the Zone
BZ	Below the Zone
CASAL	Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership
CGSOC	Command and General Staff Officer College
COM	Center of Mass
CSA	Chief of Staff of the Army
CSL	Centralized Selection List
DA	Department of the Army
DA PAM	Department of the Army Pamphlet
DGDP	Directorate of Graduate Degree Programs
DOPMA	Defense Officer Personnel Management Act
EFMP	Exceptional Family Member Program
G1	A staff name given to the Human Resources section of the Army or unit.
GDP	Graduate Degree Programs
GPA	Grade Point Average
HRC	Human Resources Command

IPPS-A	Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army
MACP	Married Army Couple Program
MOI	Memorandum of Instruction
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MSAF	Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback
OCS	Officer Candidate School
OER	Officer Evaluation Report
OML	Order of Merit List
SECArmy	Secretary of the Army
SGA	Small Group Advisor
TAG	The Adjutant General
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command
UCMJ	Uniform Code of Military Justice
U.S.C.	United States Code

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PREFACE

This study examines the feasibility of integrating twenty first century computer technology within the current promotion evaluation and talent management systems of the United States Army's active duty Officer Corps in order to better select and place the individuals most likely to succeed and improve the greater organization. This research is not meant to be a condemnation of the current Officer Evaluation Report (OER), promotion board system, or order of merit list (OML), nor is it the researcher's intent to recommend elimination of any of these systems. However, a necessary and fundamental paradigm shift is necessary on how the Army approaches all of these components of talent management in order to maximize talent and skill placement, motivation and trust of the officer corps, and cost savings for the Army.

There exist many recent studies and articles which examine and repudiate components of these systems and suggest solutions to counter the perceived discrepancies. The problem with these proposals often is that they fail to take into consideration the larger system within which their narrowly-focused research was conducted. All these systems inter-relate; a small change in one area would have considerable impacts and consequences to all other systems. Without considering the second and third-order impact, any recommendation for change fails to provide actual substantive value for action to be taken. As a result, many legitimate recommendations do not get the attention they deserve.

It is not the researcher's intention to replicate previous studies. This research is pursued with the intention of providing the Army with a viable potential solution to a problem. I will look more broadly at the area of talent management and pursue finding

robust recommendations that will address the central problem while taking into consideration a multitude of secondary or tertiary issues. I will consult with senior leaders, mid-level leaders, and the population for which I hope to make a positive impact. The concluding recommendations will therefore be vetted, feasible, acceptable, suitable, sustainable, and complete. Finally, in order for change to be accepted and desired the status quo must first be deemed unacceptable and the value of the proposal must demonstrate that the benefits of change outweigh the costs associated with that change.

The following chapters of this research will not only focus on finding the best solutions, but also convincing the reader that change is not only desired, it is necessary. In chapter 1, I will outline the various contentions within the officer talent management system. I will cite specific issues with the status quo regarding the OER, promotion board, and the OML systems, the impact these problems have on officers and the force in general, and lastly the price associated with not attempting to fix these problems. Chapter 2 will reveal what current research tells us regarding each of these systems and what secondary or tertiary impacts need to be considered in order for a solution to be suitable, sustainable and complete. Chapter 3 will focus on the process I will take to vet a feasible and acceptable integration of technology to talent management. Chapter 4 will outline the results and analysis of the data I collected, and chapter 5 will provide the conclusion and recommendations to the Army.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The current promotion system serves us well, but that doesn't mean it can't be improved. . . . Most of the time, and for most of our people it works well. The problem, however, is that DoD can't take a one-size-fits-all approach. The current promotion system for officers can lead to a particular assignment going to the most senior person on the list, even if someone else a bit lower down would be more effective in the job. It also means that high-performing officers who get selected for promotion a year or two ahead of their peers often have to wait in line behind everyone else more senior—sometimes for a year or more—which prevents putting their talent to use as soon as it may be needed. It's counter-productive.¹

— Secretary of Defense Ash Carter
June 9, 2016

Overview

When the US Army promotion board convenes to evaluate the potential of Captains to the rank of Major there are several items they take into consideration. The board members must review the respective laws governing the board selection from the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA), guidance from the Secretary of the Army (SECArmy), and associated Army regulations (AR) and policies, including 10 U.S.C. §§ 611-632; U.S. Department of Defense, Dir. 1320.12, and AR 600-8-29. The convening board members are provided access to each candidate's file, which contains a significant amount of information. However, the board often narrows the scope of what is

¹Richard Sisk, "Proposed Updates to Military Promotions Need OK from Congress: Carter," *Daily-News*, 9 June 2016, accessed 11 November 2016, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/06/09/proposed-updates-military-promotions-need-ok-congress-carter.html>.

evaluated to key developmental (KD) officer evaluation reports (OERs),² time in KD assignments, a photograph of the individual being evaluated, whether he or she passed the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), and approved medical information.³

Chief among the criteria considered is the OER. Army Regulation (AR) 623-3 states the “Evaluation Reporting System will continue to be the most accurate and effective assessment tool and development system possible.”⁴ The OER is the primary source for the evaluation reporting system and serves as an assessment to determine whether an officer can work at increasing levels of responsibility in relation to his or her peers. It uses the performance during the rated period as a basis for measuring the rated individual’s future potential.⁵

While these statements are considered true and cemented into our espoused beliefs through regulation and Department of Army Pamphlets, they have been refuted by research and perception of the officer corps. Multiple studies conducted would argue the validity and reliability of OERs as an effective means of assessing job performance and

² According to DA PAM 600-3, the OER is intended to affect promotions, school selection, functional designation, and command and key billet selection.

³ Scott Maucione, “How Army’s Archaic Evaluation System is Hurting the Service,” *Federal News Radio*, 2 August 2016, accessed 2 November 2016, <http://federalnewsradio.com/army/2016/10/army-best-soldiers-forced-out>, 5.

⁴ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 623-3, *Evaluation Reporting System* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 3, accessed 3 October 2016, http://www.ncosupport.com/files/ar623_3.pdf.

⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Pamphlet (PAM) 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2014), 38, accessed 3 October 2016, <https://www.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/376665.pdf>.

placing talent currently. In fact, 80 percent of officers surveyed believe the Army does not do a good job of matching talents with jobs and only 6 percent believe the Army retains the best leaders.⁶ OERs only capture a small portion of what a given individual accomplished and is written subjectively through the lens of the rater and senior rater.⁷ While some subjective evaluations may be accurate, there is most often little or no objective data to support the rater's or senior rater's opinion.⁸

The subjectivity of OERs is acknowledged and accepted within the Army. "The assessment of an officer's potential⁹ is a one-sided judgment of the officer's capability to perform at a specified level of responsibility, authority, or sensitivity."¹⁰ Despite the subjectivity of the evaluations, the Army still accepts this method as the primary means of identifying officers for promotion.

With so much confidence and reliance on the rater's and senior rater's comments, one would assume a careful analysis of statements within the board. However, according to retired Lieutenant General David Barno, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, the board members tend to spend one to two minutes per individual file and "typically don't

⁶ Tim Kane, *Bleeding Talent: How the U.S. Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It's Time for a Revolution* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 238.

⁷ Thomas Fleming Jr., "Pilot Specialists: The Potential for Dual-Track Personnel Management of U.S. Air Force Pilots," (Master's thesis, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1980) 17.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Imperative to this research is the understanding and specificity of terminology. Please see Appendix A for definitions of terms—like potential—as they will be used throughout this paper.

¹⁰ Headquarters, Department of the Army, PAM 600-3, 38.

even look at all the comments from the senior officers” in the OERs.¹¹ The board members, which can number from five to twenty-five, are essentially grabbing for rapid clues to quickly place officers into one of six categories.

The Order of Merit List

The final product from the board process is a published order of merit list (OML)¹², which identifies all officers to be promoted and in what order. Since the promotion of all individuals on the list can take eighteen months or longer to complete, it is important to know where one stands amongst their peers. A delayed promotion means a definite loss of money to the individual, less time for evaluations written within the next grade, and less potential opportunities for key developmental jobs, as stated in the quote by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter. There is tremendous time and money spent to ensure that the board convened is capable to provide the Army with an educated assessment of future potential. Unfortunately, the OML created by the board is not the same OML which is published and implemented for sequence numbers. The process and priority of advancement within the officer ranks is complicated, vague, and lacks transparency; it is no wonder the system is perceived by most officers as lacking equity (Kane 2012).¹³ A lack of shared understanding of Army expectations in the future force leads to mistrust in

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

¹² Imperative to this research is the understanding and specificity of terminology. Please see Appendix A for definitions of terms—like order of merit—as they will be used throughout this paper.

¹³ Kane, 238.

the OERs and causes rated individuals to question the validity of the senior raters' assessments.¹⁴

The board recommends who should be promoted and who should not, but the order of precedence identified is not reflected in the published sequence numbers. Those selected for promotion are not placed in order by potential. On the contrary, the published sequence numbers lack any objectivity or subjectivity. It is void of any input from the convening board and is based on date of rank and commissioning source. Among active duty officers not from a military academy, the subsequent break down is:

1. Date of Rank
2. Seniority in prior service rank
3. Total federal time
4. Officer Commissioning date
5. Birthdate (age takes seniority)
6. Alphabetical order¹⁵

This sequenced priority serves to promote some groups more than others within the Army. Time in grade is identified as the most important criteria for deciding when someone should be promoted against his or her peers. Those who were overlooked in a previous board are first to be promoted in the subsequent year group if selected by the board. Those who were promoted first to Captain are next in order to be promoted to

¹⁴ Fleming, 32.

¹⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 600-8-29, *Officer Promotions* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005), 1-39, accessed 3 October 2016, http://www.irwin.army.mil/PdfFiles/CPAC_DHR_PDFs/r600_8_29.pdf.

Major. Most Captains were promoted in the same month, so this first criterion does not change the OML to a significant degree. However, for the officers who were promoted one month early or late to Captain, the causes for their early or late promotion have a multiplicative impact on their promotion to Major. The effect of having time in grade as the primary discriminator within the OML delineates a greater degree of confidence by the Army of seniority of service than performance over a given rated period. Similarly, if an officer was promoted to Captain late, whatever they did or failed to do as a Lieutenant reflects poorly for promotion to Major regardless of performance as a Captain. The fallacy to this logic is it considers the identified performance potential from Captain promotion boards foremost over any other criterion achieved while serving as a Captain.¹⁶

Officers who graduated from a military academy experience a different, but similarly inequitable ranking to promotions. Since their time in grade and time in service are largely all the same, the Army ranks their placement on the OML based on performance from their undergraduate degree at the Academy. This placement remains regardless of rank and therefore, performance within the Army never serves to change precedence within a given year group unless chosen to promote below the zone or above the zone.¹⁷

¹⁶ The OML to Captain is the same as to Major and uses the same criteria. Therefore, someone who tends to have a late commissioning date, is younger than peers and has a name that starts low in the alphabet may have a much more difficult time staying competitive with peers regardless of performance or potential.

¹⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army, AR 600-8-29, 1-39.

The non-academy individuals most likely to be lowest on the promotion list to Major are those whose date of entry or commissioning date occurred last within their year group, did not serve with any other government agency prior to entering the service, were born later in their cohort, and have a last name lower in the alphabet. The academy graduates most likely to be lowest on the promotion list are those who earned lower marks in their undergraduate studies. Consider for a moment, an officer for whom these scenarios might apply and realize this is true regardless of how he or she performed in the Army for ten or more years of service.

Time in service gives priority to those who have the earliest commissioning date. Within all officers of a given year group there is a priority given to Officer Candidate School (OCS) graduates ahead of non-OCS officers, since they have more time in service. Within the population of OCS graduates, those with the highest prior enlisted rank maintain a higher precedence as an officer. When one year group ends and another year group begins, is therefore a subject of debate and question, due to the aforementioned concerns.

Total federal time is the third in the order of criteria and has the least impact on OML. The reason this category has such a limited impact is because it affects so few of the population of promotable officers. However, for those who did, they have a distinct advantage to promote earlier to Captain and Major than the clear majority of officer who do not have this experience.

First day on duty serves to prioritize West Point graduates ahead of most ROTC graduates. Whereas West Point graduates start active duty immediately upon commissioning, ROTC graduates typically do not start active duty until reporting to their

first duty location. Consider a ROTC graduate and compare them to a peer who graduated on the same day from West Point. According to the current OML, regardless of performance of the two officers, the West Point graduate stands a much better chance of being promoted earlier than the ROTC graduate. The cumulative effect of always promoting earlier and receiving job opportunities and the associated OERs at the next rank sooner, may contribute to the disproportionately high percentage of senior Army Officers being West Point graduates. For example, “as of March 2014, twelve of fourteen U.S. Army four-star Generals were West Pointers,” despite the fact that West Point graduates only comprise roughly 25 percent of the Army officer corps.¹⁸

The fifth criteria in the OML to Major is birthdate. Perhaps the argument for this is that an older officer has greater potential to succeed in the next pay grade than a younger officer. There is no evidence to support this assumption and the standard deviation of eligible officer by age is nearly negligible. It is difficult to argue that a month or a few days makes a significant difference in potential, particularly when performance is not even considered.

The sixth and seventh criterion for the Major promotion OML is alphabetic order and reverse social security number order. Similar to the previously stated criterion, there are no logical arguments for alphabetical or social security numbers to represent merit. Additionally, there are no known studies which suggest these criterion as having a positive correlation with potential.

¹⁸ Colonel Everett Spain, “Finding and Keeping Stars: The Leadership Performance and Retention of High-Potentials” (Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA, 2014), 7.

In conclusion, the Army's current system for producing active duty officer OMLs has little objective basis in identifying potential and it fails to place officers in an order based on merit. Furthermore, this clearly depicts a distinction between an Army espoused belief (of being a meritocracy) verses an enacted behavior (reverence toward seniority). This system is used for every promotion from Captain to Colonel. Therefore, the order it creates, starting with promotion to Captain, has a multiplicative impact for promotion to each subsequent rank. The distance in time and opportunity between promotions of peers becomes greater with each rank. Its continued implementation will undoubtedly prolong distrust amongst the ranks and carry on the practice, which Secretary Ash Carter accurately depicted as ineffective and counterproductive (Sisk 2016).¹⁹ The Army human resources staff (G1) promotes based on needs of the Army and seniority, not merit.

Topic of Research

My research topic is the Army Officer promotion evaluation and distribution system. My topic is significant to the military profession because it affects all military personnel. The institution has a moral obligation to ensure the leaders it chooses to advance in rank are the most qualified and contain the greatest potential for improving the organization. Inherent to this obligation, is the requirement to minimize, to the greatest extent possible, all potentialities for corruption and bias; while at the same time maximizing the benefit, and minimizing the cost.

¹⁹ Sisk, 1.

There is a logical imperative to place talent and skills across an organization where and when they are most needed.²⁰ Therefore, it is in the best interest of the Army to increase talent management through a robust evaluation of performance, talent, and skills and to increase effectiveness through a systematic approach of distributing capabilities to identified gaps. My topic is significant to other scholars because talent management, evaluation systems, and promotions are areas which have perplexed small to large companies worldwide. Billions of dollars every year are spent on helping corporations assess and place the right person to the right job.²¹ While not all military tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) readily translate to the private sector, this research may have a positive impact on possible approaches. My topic will attempt to fill a gap in the scholarly literature by highlighting weaknesses of the active duty US Army's current promotion, evaluation, talent management, and officer placement systems and provide potential solutions.

Researcher's Qualification and Bias

I am qualified to explore this topic because of my personal experience and observation of the system's success and failures over the last twelve years. I have

²⁰ Ed Rankin, "Global Talent Management Forum," Human Capital Institute: The Global Association for Strategic Talent Management, November 18, 2014, accessed November 13, 2016, <http://www.hci.org/hr-conferences/2014-Global-Talent/overview>.

²¹ Marcus Buckingham, "Out With The Old, In With...: One by one, Companies are Ditching their Performance Management Approaches, but What's a better Method?," *Talent Development*, 1 August 2016, accessed 14 October 2016, <https://www.td.org/Publications/Magazines/TD/TD-Archive/2016/08/Out-with-the-Old-in-With>.

witnessed many examples of success and failure; below are just a few that shape my perception of the current system.

I worked hard, driven by an extreme passion toward the profession. As a result, I excelled and received top numeration throughout my time as a platoon leader, staff officer, and as a Company Commander. In fact, I received only above center of mass (ACOM) OERs until my last duty station. Other leaders with similar drives also did very well. There are successes within the system. However, not everyone who works hard, and demonstrates character, competence, and commitment receives the credit due; some individuals receive unearned promotions and credit.

A company commander and executive officer with whom I served were caught and found guilty for hiding a .50 caliber machine gun inside an air vent in the basement of their Combat Outpost, which belonged to a sister unit. They had allegedly planned to throw it over a bridge into an Iraqi River to ruin the careers of the officers responsible for the weapon. Despite being found guilty, they both stayed in position through the deployment and were both promoted on time with peers following redeployment.

Another example is an officer I replaced due to incompetence. I personally witnessed his lack of skill, character, and void leadership in practice. He was fired in two subsequent jobs, but never received a relief for cause OER. As a result, he was promoted on time with peers.

In the process of conducting research for this thesis, I came across numerous stories individuals wanted to share with me. It seems that everyone knows of several examples and none of them were acceptable. The commonness and frequency of these stories serve to damage the trust between officers and the institution's talent

management. It should be noted when examples of injustices within the system were retold, it was done with a sense of disillusionment or fatigued apathy. Most individuals with whom I spoke do not have much faith or hope that a change will bring about a more equitable solution.

Two friends of mine are a dual military couple. They are both Engineer officers from the same year group, school, and have served in the same units. They earned the same certificates and near equivalent evaluations throughout their eleven years of service, yet one was promoted to Major and the other was not. This friend, who has no negative marks on record was not promoted, yet many officers guilty of various atrocities were promoted.

My first Center of Mass (COM) rated OER was not the result of effectiveness, competence, skill, work ethic, or knowledge. I was informed that my first COM was due to the fact that I was already promotable, and someone else needed it to be promotable. My peers and I were told upon arrival not to expect ACOM OERs until our last year or two at the location.

Over the twelve years I served, there seemed to be more instances of inequity than equity. Many discussions with peers revealed similar, and in some cases, even more unbelievable examples of inequality between work, motivation, and effort versus evaluation, recognition, and promotion. Unfortunately, these experiences also provide a foundation of bias from which I approach the topic. I am motivated to reduce said instances of inequity within our profession.

I have substantial shared knowledge with seven peers from a number of other countries' militaries and the US Army's sister services. Lastly, and most importantly, I

have earned a Masters of Arts degree in Organizational Psychology and Leadership from Columbia University's Teacher's College. There, I studied among other things, organizational change, adult learning, managing talent, and motivational theories.

Primary Research Question

My primary research question is: Does the current active duty Army system accurately consider the SecArmy's guidance to promote objectively and merit-based Captains with the greatest amount of potential?

Secondary Research Questions

To answer the primary question, there are three secondary questions the research seeks to answer.

2. Could the Army stifle productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency by continuing its current method of promotion evaluation for officers?

3. Can and how would an objective, merit-based, automated evaluation system be implemented in the Army Officer promotion system to improve effectiveness of talent management?

4. How can the Army balance the costs associated with consolidating information on candidates with the accuracy of assessing the talent the Army wants?

Problem

I intend to answer the research questions by conducting extensive research to identify discrepancies between the Army's espoused beliefs and enacted practices with

respect to promotion boards and evaluations.²² I will confirm or deny the existence of any negative consequences as a potential result of these discrepancies using a questionnaire administered to a cross section of Army officers in the grades of Captain, Major, and Lieutenant Colonel. I will conduct no less than nine interviews with individuals who have sat on promotion boards or who have extensive inside knowledge as to the processes. I will culminate my research by proposing an alternative to the current process the US Army uses.

Delimitations

For purposes of this thesis I will not study the potential impacts of a merit-based, objective evaluation system on branch selection of Army personnel or assignment selection. However, it should be recognized that a robust database for promotions also has an equally potential impact on other selection applications if the weighting of data corresponds with the needs and requirements of the proposed output. This may come in handy, particularly when reassignments or functional area selections are necessary.

The psychological effects, hygiene factors, or demotivating factors associated with not assessing individuals according to their respective effort and performance will not be studied. Suffice to say, there is a negative impact and it promotes mediocrity.

The Centralized Selection List (CSL) boards or Lieutenant Colonel or higher promotion boards will not be studied. It can be acknowledged, however, that a robust

²² Edgar Schein, one of the most well-known Social Psychologists of today, identified that a significant number of problems organizations experience initially stems from a disconnection or lack of alignment between espoused beliefs and enacted practices. This is also often referred to as the iceberg theory: what is readily seen above the surface does not match the basic underlying assumptions underneath the surface.

correction to the system in the lower ranks will have a significant impact on the later promotions.²³ Regardless if CSL boards or Lieutenant Colonel boards adopt a similar system to the researcher's recommendation here within, the adjustment in evaluating officers by potential will change the order of who is promoted and when; thus it will have an impact on higher ranks. For example, the data collected to enable a merit-based evaluation system would not serve only the identification of best candidates for promotion to Major, but also could help to distinguish the best candidates for other purposes as well. This does not suggest that one OML is useful for all requirements. Rather, the data base and capability is what is transferable. Also, by reducing the bias, and increasing objective, merit-based evaluations, the population of eligible officers for promotions to Lieutenant Colonel would more than likely be different.

This research will similarly not consider the board selection for promotable Captains to the Command and General Staff Officer College or any other career limiting boards. The proposed solutions of this research could have the potential to assist all forms of board panel selections.

The researcher will not study the enlisted promotions, Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) promotion boards, or Warrant Officer promotion boards. It falls outside of the scope of what can be studied. However, the development of a more robust, accurate and effective, objective officer promotion system may influence changes to the enlisted and Warrant Officer promotions systems as well. It is possible that the same or similar

²³ As per 10 U.S.C. §§ 611-632; DoD directive 1320.12, the Army promotion system selects and advances officers in the ranks of Captain to Major General for promotion. A significant change in the regulation pertaining to the ranks of Captain to Major would necessarily have an impact on all subsequent ranks.

systems could be established for NCO and Warrant Officer ranks. It should also be noted that one aspect of Warrant Officer promotion selections did contribute to the proposal in chapter 5.²⁴ Warrant Officer promotion boards evaluate fully qualified and best qualified by comparing individual's files against others of the same branch.²⁵

Although it was considered, the researcher will not present research on other regional leading countries' processes for promotion evaluation and talent management, to gain perspectives on other potential best practices. Unfortunately, all countries considered from four different continents have similar, to near identical practices as the US Army. The inclusion of this research would bring little noteworthy insights.

Limitations

Time is a critical limitation with respect to this research. Data collection and analysis will be inhibited accordingly. The research involves a highly bureaucratic topic of study to which the researcher has little previous knowledge or experience. There is a great deal of information being generated daily on this topic due to concerns addressed at all levels across the Army. Not all data is objective, scientific, or research based, however the clear majority supports common threads and themes to which the researcher focused.

²⁴ Warrant Officers of one branch do not compete against Warrant Officers of a different branch. There is goodness to this system as will be discussed in chapter 2.

²⁵ Major General William D. R. Waff, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 20 January 2017.

Assumptions

The following are a list of assumptions implemented for purposes of simplifying and facilitating the research into a comprehensible topic of study.

1. The greatest indicator of future potential is past performance. Past performance does not guarantee future potential; however, it is identified as one of the greatest indicators.

a. When an investor is deciding on what stocks to buy or sell, he or she starts by determining goals and risks, assessing the market, and then narrowing down the search through evaluating performances.

Performance is evaluated through an assessment of the prospectus, total return, simple return, calculating the compound annual growth rate, assessing the absolute vs. relative performance, and comparison against a benchmark (Koch 2005).²⁶ Even after this is all said and done it is also important to assess your investment advisor over time and ensure that the cost is worth the potential profit. There is no guarantee of earnings, but that is not an excuse for throwing one's money into a stock without considerable research to ensure the investment stands the best chance of having a favorable return on investment.

b. So too should an evaluation of future leadership be made, with scrutiny toward a plethora of criteria as a basis from which to make educated decisions on best possible outcomes. After this is already accomplished,

²⁶ Edward T. Koch, *The Complete Idiot's guide to Investing*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2005), 3-7.

it is also important to consult the “advisor” or raters over time and even then, there is no guarantee. The consultation of an advisor is made as supplemental to good research and evaluations, not as a replacement of proper consideration of facts. Should not the Army invest more effort into the picking of its future leaders than the average investor in picking stocks?

2. What we evaluate at the Company level is not what is needed at the Major and above level to be successful. The role of the senior rater is to distinguish between these two and truly hone in on individuals capable of serving successfully in the next higher positions.
 - a. A component of this assumption is that senior raters are capable of distinguishing between the two with a great degree of accuracy. It is not assumed that this happens with regularity, only that senior raters are capable to make this happen.
 - b. In order to quantify this, it is imperative to define what is meant by potential prior to research being conducted on the topic. This leads to the next assumption.
3. It is possible to successfully identify individuals who have the greatest potential for promotion.
 - a. Catching the best talent or greatest potential in the Army is like catching the biggest fish in the pond. The bigger the net that is thrown, the greater the likelihood of catching more fish and distinguishing the one

that is biggest. Using a system which relies on only a few inputs to evaluate is like trying to find that big fish with a very small net.

b. What is worse is if those inputs are inaccurate or have the potential of including bias, than the net is being cast in shallow waters and has holes in it. Work must be done to ensure the Army's system is, as much as possible, void of bias or inaccuracies.

4. The more we know about an individual and the more we can compare candidates, the greater the chance of success. However, there is a direct relationship between accuracy of the data output and cost. Due to a law of averages, the more data collected, the more accurate the result will be and the greater the cost associated with acquiring it will become. To relate this back to the analogy: The greater the number of criteria to evaluate, the larger the net and the greater the cost.
5. It is possible to have a self-correcting system that both accounts for changes in the operational environment and identified deficiencies within the system. To throw a big net is not enough, it must be thrown in the right place, where the biggest fish are likely to be found. To truly be an effective tool, each year's net should be thrown based on corrections or adjustments learned from previous years' successes or failures and based on what the Army needs in the future.

Chapter Summary

The next chapter will provide a literature review that will attempt to answer the primary research question. It will comprehensively summarize and briefly evaluate the existing literature on the three secondary research questions. Through this review the

researcher will find gaps within the current literature and attempt to fill those gaps in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is by no means enough that a [leader] should be capable...He should be as well a gentleman of liberal education, refined manners, punctilious courtesy and the nicest sense of personal honor...No meritorious act of a subordinate should escape his attention, even if the reward be only one word of approval. Conversely, he should not be blind to a single fault in any subordinate.²⁷

— John Paul Jones
September 1775

Purpose

The purpose of this literature review is to answer the primary research question, Does the current active duty Army system accurately promote objectively and merit-based Captains with the greatest amount of potential? A review of private and public sectors will help identify common schools of thought, important contemporary authors on the subject, recent examples and their respective effects, and ways other writers have studied the problem. All information collected and presented will be evaluated in terms of whether it supports or contradicts the primary research question.

Current private sector leaders in the field of talent management, identify three main goals of global talent agility as:

1. Succession planning
2. Developing high potentials

²⁷ John P. Jones, “John Paul Jones Quotes,” ThinkExist.com: Finding Quotation was Never This Easy!, accessed 15 May 2017, <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/it-is-by-no-means-enough-that-an-officer-be/409153.html>, 1.

3. Building a strong pipeline through recruitment.²⁸

All three of these goals require an organization to be able to identify and develop “the right employees with the right skills, at the right price, in the right place, at the right time.”²⁹ This could arguably be the purpose behind the promotion evaluation and talent management systems of the Army. Leaders in this field such as: Cynthia Palumbo (Vice President, Global Talent Management and Development at MasterCard), Dr. Michelle M. Crosby (Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer at FRHI Hotels and Resorts), Ariel Regatky (Director of Talent Management, Latin America and Mexico at Citi), Ed Rankin (Leader of Learning and Development CompuCom Systems), and Mark Ruth (Director of Research and Education of International Coach Federation) agree that effective talent management is accomplished through leveraging employee profiles, performance data, and skill sets to analyze readiness.³⁰ Additionally, they argue that identifying, developing, and retaining the next generation of leaders is best accomplished through refining high potential selection criteria with new skills and capabilities.³¹ These leaders clearly advocate for a robust mechanism tailored to evaluating more than just performance evaluations.

This opinion is further supported in other meta-researchers’ condemnation of attempts to predict leadership behavior using only single predictors. Lord and Hall

²⁸ Rankin, 2.

²⁹ Ibid., 1.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 4.

identify that the “prediction of leadership is likely to be a multivariate problem.”³²

Denoting those who excel in performance alone, is not sufficiently adequate to label them as high potential. Furthermore, a study by Schmidt and Hunter concluded that “the combination of employees’ general mental ability and their performance on a work sample test had the second highest multivariate validity and utility for predicting job performance.”³³ There are different opinions on what individual variables help to predict performance, but research clearly supports robust mechanisms tailored toward a more holistic approach are better than looking at any one criteria.

Colonel Everett Spain, a professor in Behavioral Science and Leadership at the United States Military Academy, considers defining high potentials into two categories: “best,” referring to a motivational component and “brightest,” referring to cognitive ability.³⁴ In his research of West Point graduates, Colonel Spain discovered that Captains with a one standard deviation higher SAT scores (e.g. 1370 over 1270), had 27 percent ($p \leq 0.01$) lower odds of being selected early for promotion to Major. This negative correlation continued for BZ promotions to Lieutenant Colonel and Battalion Command Selection, even though “cognitive ability has been found to be the strongest predictor of success in high-complexity and managerial jobs.”³⁵ His research also found 63 percent higher odds of being promoted early to Major for officers with an academic Grade Point

³² R. G. Lord and R. J. Hall, “Contemporary Views of Leadership and Individual Differences,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1992): 137-157.

³³ Spain, 43.

³⁴ Ibid., 11.

³⁵ Ibid., 52.

Average (GPA) one standard deviation higher than otherwise identical officers. Lastly, an above average subjective military GPA predicts a 576 percent increase odds of getting promoted early to Major. Spain also acknowledges there is a difference between leadership performance and leadership effectiveness. The former is based on the outward perception of the individual; the latter is the actual effectiveness.³⁶ Therefore, assessments of individual leaders' military GPAs may reflect the evaluator's or organization's perception of effectiveness over the actual performance and potential. Context matters, therefore weighing performance results based on situational considerations might increase validity.

Performance Evaluations

An outspoken author of talent management within the Army is Tim Kane. In his book, *Bleeding Talent*, he asserts the Army is incapable of retaining the best and most talented officers. The primary reason he argues is due to the Army's failed attempt to effectively manage its workforce.³⁷ His criticism includes a rebuke of the military's ability to assess competence through the OER process. This is supported by a two-year research effort conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which identified that the current leader development and promotion systems are not up to the task of consistently identifying and advancing highly competent leaders.³⁸ The Army

³⁶ Ibid., 12.

³⁷ Kane, 238.

³⁸ Scott F. Donahue, "Assessing Leadership Potential for the Army's Future Force" (Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks. 2004), 6.

intended to improve personnel management, talent retention, and promotions by changing the OER in 2014. However, the same criticisms associated with the old OER have continued.

In the previous chapter, Army regulations identified the OER as the primary means of assessing talent and potential. Despite recent changes, the current OER remains an invalid tool for measuring talent. Although there is conformity with respect to the regulation, it is a false assumption to conclude that senior leaders are accurately identifying and assessing officers with strong potential. There is no assessment conducted to confirm “senior rater quality and accuracy or rated officer satisfaction, confidence, and trust.”³⁹ In other words, the Army has no mechanism to prove it is measuring what it claims to measure. If a changed OER is to be effective, it must have a means to evaluate its effectiveness. This would require some form of evaluation validation outside of the chain of command.

The OER uses a 49 percent above center of mass (ACOM) requirement provided by senior leaders. Why would the Army only care if someone is in the top 49 percent or the bottom 51 percent center of mass (COM)? Why not also assess the top 10 percent and the bottom 10 percent? Are not these the individuals most likely to be BZ or AZ for promotion? Former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch is a strong advocate for assessing and eliminating the bottom 10 percent and writes about it in his book, Jack:

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

Straight from the Gut.⁴⁰ Some organizations break up assessing the population into thirds: top, middle, and bottom.⁴¹ Despite the Army's senior raters assessing most officers into one of two categories, promotion OML results are subdivided into at least thirteen categories (each month has a different population to be promoted and there are those not selected for promotion). One way to improve the board selection is to have the board members assess files on a thirteen-point scale and / or redistribute their results on a thirteen-point scale. Regardless of how many categories there are to grade an officer's potential and performance, the input should mirror the output. That is, the evaluation's categories should match the published results. Otherwise, the more ambiguous the process, the more it will be questioned due to lack of trust.

Skewed Evaluations

Many corporations and companies of varying size are having difficulty attempting to maximize the effectiveness of talent management in light of recent studies which refute traditional methods. The problem with tying performance evaluation feedback to assessing promotions is, according to Marcus Buckingham (founder and CEO of TMBC and author of *Stand Out* and other publications), that leaders who know their feedback assesses potential promotions, tend to skew their feedback.⁴² It is common for most companies to assume this can be mitigated through training leaders and designing ratings

⁴⁰ Jack Welch suggests that cutting the bottom 10 percent every year creates a culture of low tolerance for poor achievement and the result is a more efficient, hard-working, and high-performing organization.

⁴¹ Waff, Interview, 20 January.

⁴² Buckingham, "Out With The Old, In With," 45.

scales “to enable people to be reliable raters of other people . . . [yet] decades of research reveal that we are all hopelessly unreliable raters of others.”⁴³ This organizational tendency relates to a common psychological trap called escalation of commitment.

Private Sector Solutions

GE, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Microsoft, Adobe, Netflix, Motorola, Disney, Medtronic and many more companies are choosing to avoid escalation of commitment and are instead, abandoning traditional performance reviews; some are not replacing them.⁴⁴ Not having any form of evaluating talent or performance is an unorthodox school of thought. Unfortunately, the perceived benefit of this course of action has already been disproven. CEB research identified that companies which eliminate all forms of ratings, experience a “ten percent drop in employee performance, despite initial enthusiasm for new systems.”⁴⁵ If removing traditional performance reviews is so detrimental to productivity, and is conceptually hard to understand, then why would so many private corporations be considering its implementation?

Army Solutions

The Army is no different; leaders tend to fall into the same traps of attempting to improve a broken system through training and or tweaks that focus on the symptoms rather than the problem. How does one fix it? The school of thought on the previous page

⁴³ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 45.

would argue to keep OERs from being part of promotion boards entirely because the evaluations are subjectively skewed simply by being considered and reviewed by the board. It is no wonder so many companies are dumping this subjectively ineffective system of linking evaluating performance to promotion assessments, but it still does not solve the productivity loss, if there is one.⁴⁶ Assuming this study is applicable to the Army, an OER necessarily motivates extrinsically-minded Soldiers, but any revision to it will not correct its validity. The OER is not the problem, the way it is implemented as the main tool for promotion assessments is.

Marcus Buckingham suggests a potential solution for the performance assessment. He identifies as much as 60 percent of a given evaluation reflects the rater, not the rated.⁴⁷ Therefore, ratings are a form of bad data which should not be used for evaluating performance, potential, strategic thinking, or empathy unless inverted to assess the rater.

Like-Me Bias

A study conducted by Professor Lauren Rivera of the Kellogg School of Management suggests that when evaluators do not have a series of rigorous merit-based criteria from which to assess candidates, they tended to fall back on judging people by

⁴⁶ The Army does not produce anything tangible. Therefore, is the ten percent productivity loss experienced by corporations in America a concern? The productivity loss observed in these civilian companies relates to a decrease in work ethic of employees who are extrinsically motivated. Therefore, it is plausible that the results of this study may still be generalizable to the military; to assume otherwise could be detrimental.

⁴⁷ Buckingham, “Out With The Old, In With,” 46.

similarities to themselves.⁴⁸ The idea that people tend to promote individuals most like themselves is not new, however, and there are many euphemisms that relate. There is a danger to promote those most like the leadership besides the fact that it disregards the one best suited or deserving.

The Army's current answer to this problem is not well known or understood. As a function of this research, it must be determined whether the DA Secretariat and Army leaders are aware or acknowledge that evaluators tend to assess subordinates most like themselves with higher ratings. What is the opinion of adding rigorous merit-based criteria to improve the assessment process at the source? Is there an accepted confirmation that evaluations are likely skewed not only because of cognitive bias of the rater, but also because OERs refer to perceptions rather than the reality of individual performance? Lastly, what are senior leaders' suggestions or ideas for fixing this? The Army G1 through the DA Secretariat allows the promotion board to deliberate over the candidates' files and develop an OML based on potentially skewed data. The HRC office reorders the promotion board OML based on regulations and laws stated in chapter 1.⁴⁹ This is an attempt to make results more in line with the needs of the Army. The OML created by the board, no matter how sound or just, is irrelevant. The list of individuals identified for promotion can be tactfully modified to ensure needs of the Army are met and sequence numbers are assigned by seniority rather than performance.

⁴⁸ Drake Baer, "If You Want To Get Hired, Act Like Your Potential Boss," *Business Insider*, 29 May 2014, accessed 14 January 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/managers-hire-people-who-remind-them-of-themselves-2014-5>, 1.

⁴⁹ Department of Military Personnel Management Lieutenant Colonel, interview by author, Fort Knox, KY, 22 March 2017.

Alternative Approaches

Marcus suggests a different approach for using ratings to better evaluate someone. He believes the secret is to invert the evaluations. By assessing individuals based on how they would rate or place others, a leader can gauge the evaluator.⁵⁰ He goes on to identify ways in which performance can be maintained at high levels. Studies by TMBC, Gallup, and others show that performance is accelerated when team members feel they have a chance to do what they do best every day and they know what is expected of them at work.⁵¹ The research identifies the best leaders are those who create these feelings with their subordinates by one-on-one, ten minute conversations weekly regarding necessary work and resources for near-term future requirements. Per this study, a leader can be evaluated based on the consistency of the responses of his or her subordinates to these two components of their work. The study also detracts from measuring performance alone, since it is rarely accomplished by one individual. However, current Human Resource systems have not yet developed abilities to account for the dynamics of teams and groups working together, despite most work environments being collaborative in nature.

If the Army were to consider this study for potential solutions, there are systems currently in place to leverage a solution. A systematic adjustment to the OER could possibly reconstitute an unadulterated focus on performance and not potential for promotion. This alteration would facilitate removing much of the associated bias and

⁵⁰ Buckingham, "Out With The Old, In With," 48.

⁵¹ Ibid.

provide a potential for inverting OERs to assess the evaluator. Secondly, the requirement to gain input from subordinates lends credence to a 360 degree-type tool. The Army already uses the Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) program as a leader development tool, albeit not very well.

360 Degree Assessments

The MSAF program is an Army mandated tool which enables individuals to gain self-awareness as to perceived strengths and weaknesses. However, leaders from across the force increasingly see MSAF as ineffective or lacking in value, not because it is inherently flawed, but because the Army's implementation of it is flawed.⁵² COL Kevin McAninch, a Military Intelligence Officer and 2016 graduate of the US Army War College, identifies five reasons why the 2012-2014 CASAL surveys report such low appreciation and perceived effectiveness of the MSAF.⁵³ The common denominator of all five reasons is a lack of leader involvement.⁵⁴ Fifty-six percent of field grade officers in 2012 identified they either did not receive performance counseling or only received it once at the end of the rating period.⁵⁵ Developing others is an area in which the Army is

⁵² Colonel Kevin McAninch, "How the Army's Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback Program Could Become a Catalyst for Leader Development," *Military Review* (September-October 2016): 84.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁴ The report identifies downward trends in all assessed indicators of effectiveness. The only two increases in percentages were of officers and warrant officers claiming they initiated an MSAF only to meet OER requirements. Two thirds of respondents reported devoting minimal effort to the feedback. Roughly one third of officers rated the MSAF as effective.

⁵⁵ Ryan P. Riley et al., "2014 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL): Military Leader Findings" (Technical Report, Center for

woefully deficient, a statement also substantiated by the 2012-2014 CASAL survey results.

An unpublished study conducted by NASA demonstrated how a 360-type tool could be effective at differentiating between talent. The study had leaders use a self-assessment tool and a subordinate assessment tool to place them into one of four categories.⁵⁶ There was a strong correlation between ineffective leaders and those who self-selected in the bottom 50 percent of their peers and whose subordinates also placed them in the bottom half of leaders. However, the leaders identified as most effective were those whose subordinates placed them in the top 50 percent, but they self-selected as less than best among their peers. According to this study, the most effective leaders are slightly humble, but are identified by subordinates as exceptional.⁵⁷

Per a 2014 CASAL survey, 30 percent of assessed leaders felt the MSAF was effective for improving their organization; 32 and 33 percent of field grade and company grade officers respectively rate the MSAF as effective in improving their leadership capabilities; and only 32 percent of all respondents rate the MSAF as effective for

Army Leadership, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 26 June 2015), accessed 17 November 2016, <http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cal/2014%20CASAL%20Military%20Leader%20Findings%20Report.pdf>.

⁵⁶ The leaders had to rank themselves compared to their peers with a numerical number one to ten. Similarly, each leader's subordinates assessed the leader on the same ten-point scale. Using the combination of self-assessment and subordinate assessment, the NASA researchers created a four-quadrant model to place the leaders.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

extending improvement to their organization.⁵⁸ Implementing the MSAF program as a component of evaluating leaders' effectiveness could potentially improve the objectivity and merit of the promotion system, while simultaneously reinvigorate the decline of an otherwise effective tool.

According to the Rand Corporation, the US Army recently did a study to determine the viability of implementing a 360-degree assessment tool for evaluation purposes. It was rejected due to the potential for it to diminish a developmental opportunity and because of the impact the application would have on selection boards and the promotion process.⁵⁹ Lieutenant General (Retired) David Huntoon disagrees, stating that a web-based tool and counseling that can be accessed online could be beneficial for Captains and Majors. "There are a lot of tools and instruments out there; not all of them apply to the Army, but if it can stop a toxic leader, then it is worth looking into."⁶⁰ It was determined that an anonymous assessment by peers and subordinates could be inaccurate, biased, and lack contextual understanding by the board.⁶¹ Yet, the research already discussed in this chapter identifies the current OER is guilty of having the potential to be inaccurate, biased, and lack contextual understanding by the board. By not

⁵⁸ Riley et al., "2014 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL)".

⁵⁹ Chaitra M. Hardison et al., "360-Degree Assessments: Are They the Right Tool for the U.S. Military?," (Research Report, Rand Corporation, 2016), 3, accessed 14 October 2016. www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR998.html.

⁶⁰ Lieutenant General David Huntoon, telephone interview by author, 18 April 2017.

⁶¹ Hardison et al., 3.

allowing any additional tools to be assessed, the inaccuracies, biases, and misunderstandings of the OER carry greater weight.

How to Make the OER an Effective Tool

There are tremendous amounts of recent research and study conducted on the ineffectiveness of the current OER and how it relates to promotion boards. Supporters of the research done by CEB argue the Army's promotion boards are reliant on a 1950's personnel system which is outdated and antiquated.⁶² Furthermore, there is no mechanism to validate board members' work. There exists no evaluation or statistical data to see if the board accurately implemented the commander's guidance. For an example, the guidance given to the 2016 promotion boards reflected the Secretary of Defense's call for a "different kind of Soldier; one that is creative and has advanced civilian degrees and broad experiences."⁶³ Each year the guidance is a little different, based on the needs of the Army, but what the leadership asks for does not always align with what the promotion board prioritizes according to retired Lieutenant General David Barno.⁶⁴ Major General (Retired) Steve Smith points out that boards tend to have a not so

⁶² Scott Macione, "How Army's Archaic Evaluation System is Hurting the Service," *Federal News Radio*, August 2, 2016, accessed 2 November 2016, <http://federalnewsradio.com/army/2016/10/army-best-soldiers-forced-out/>, 2.

⁶³ Scott Macione, "Are Some of the Army's Best Soldiers Being Forced Out?," *Federal News Radio*, 31 October 2016, accessed 3 November 2016, [Http://federalnewsradio.com/army/2016/10/army-best-soldiers-forced-out/](http://federalnewsradio.com/army/2016/10/army-best-soldiers-forced-out/), 7.

⁶⁴ Lieutenant General David Barno, and Nora Bensahel, "Future of the Army Today, Tomorrow, and the Day After Tomorrow," *Atlantic Council*, September 2016, accessed 3 November 2016, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Future_of_the_Army_web_0921.pdf.

subtle bias to value operational experience over advanced degrees as a current example of an impediment to the guidance.⁶⁵ Other bias that creep in may include: what school the officer went to, where the individual is from, or what his/her name is. A conclusion is that bias exist within any possible data collection tool, be it the OER, MSAF, or a board panel. Humans are innately consciously and subconsciously biased.

Ways to mitigate the impact of a bias is through diluting its effect or impact on the results by adding multiple sources, increasing criterion to evaluate, and decreasing human subjectivity. By having a large quantity of subjective data from various sources, it is easier to identify trends and commonalities which support truth to the assessment. For an example, if a student is identified as the smartest pupil by one instructor, it carries some weight; but, if the same student is identified as the most intelligent by all instructors, the validity is far more concrete. If all grades, quizzes, tests, and papers of every student in every class could be analyzed and compared by a computer that also assessed the amount of time taken to accomplish each assignment, the validity would be absolute.

The wealth of researched data currently assessing the OER and officer promotion system is largely negative. However, there are occasionally some positive comments. Major General Wilson Shoffner, director of the Army Talent Management Task Force argues the promotion boards do “a very good job of making the best decisions they can on the information they have available” particularly with respect to evaluating the lowest

⁶⁵ Macione, “How Army's Archaic Evaluation System is Hurting the Service,” 3.

performing officers.⁶⁶ Even this comment of support for the current evaluation system implies a better possibility exists with the inclusion of more information and time to make a better decision.

Despite the occasional positive remark from a currently serving official, it is difficult to overlook the glaring evidence. In 2010, only 6 percent of Army officers surveyed believed the service did a good job of retaining the best leaders.⁶⁷ Figure 1 shows results from surveys conducted by CASAL over the course of a three-year period showing the lack of confidence Army leaders have in the promotion, personnel management, and OER systems.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁷ Macione, “Are Some of the Army's Best Soldiers Being Forced Out?,” 7.

⁶⁸ Ryan P. Riley et al., “2012 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL): Military Leader Findings” (Technical Report, Center for Army Leadership, Fort Leavenworth, KS: 2013), accessed 16 November 2016, <http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cal/2012CaSaLMainFindingsTechnicalReport2013-1.pdf>; Ryan P. Riley et al., “2013 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL): Military Leader Findings” (Technical Report, Center for Army Leadership, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 30 April 2014), accessed 16 November 2016, <http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cal/2013CASALMainFindingsTechnicalReport2014-01.pdf>; Riley et al., “2014 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL).”

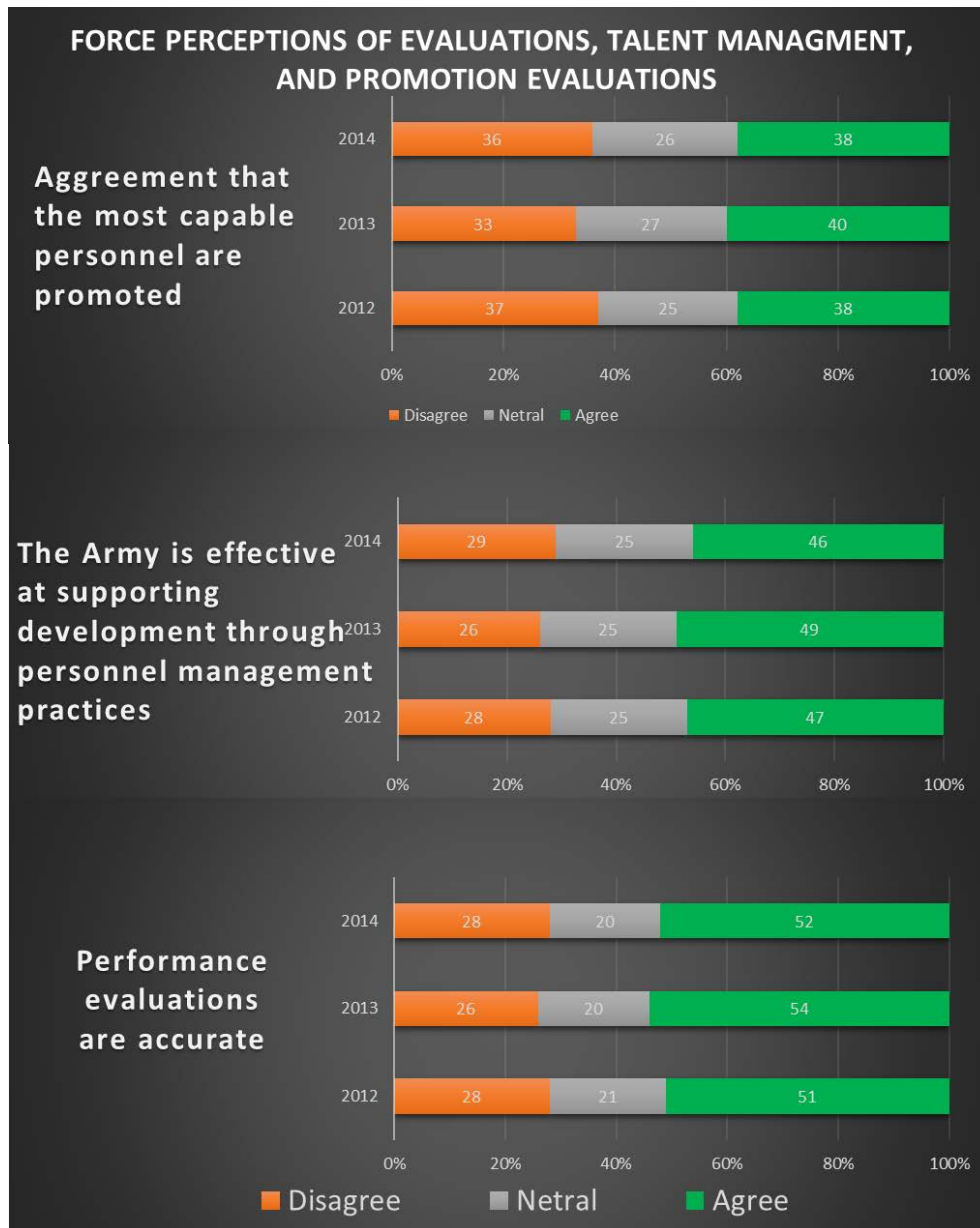


Figure 1. Perceptions of the Army's talent management effectiveness

Source: Created by author data from Department of the Army, Center for Army Leadership Survey of Army Leadership, 2012-2014.

These graphs depict a bleak picture and have potential severely negative consequences on the future force if not mitigated. It is important to point out that the

opinions represented in the graph are the views of only currently serving officers, leaving out the opinions of all who were passed over for promotions twice or were eliminated from the service through the Qualitative Service Program. Yet roughly one half, and in some cases, two thirds of all respondents do not have a positive perception of the Army's evaluation and development systems over a three-year period. There is a negative psychological impact on the motivation of individuals judged by an evaluation system perceived to lack objectivity; resulting in decrease productivity, effort, and low self-efficacy.⁶⁹ The disenfranchisement of some officers associated with the low self-efficacy apparent in these results may not be fully realized under current regulations. However, the addition of the new retirement plan and changes in generational behaviors may lead to large exoduses of high potential officers from the Army. Doctor McClary, a retired Marine Lieutenant Colonel and former team leader for the Human Dimension Task Force points out,

You cannot change or fix one component of the system without considering the impacts on all other areas of the process. We often keep metrics on individual pieces of the system without considering the impacts on other pieces. Optimizing individual pieces might be to the detriment of all others.⁷⁰

Any change to the way in which the Army manages talent, may have secondary consequences in other aspects of officer personnel management.

⁶⁹ This assertion derives from Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory, which alleges that people are driven toward goals which are desirable and attainable. The results in Figure 1 depict that most officers polled lack a sense of expectancy (believe that high effort will lead to attaining high performance), or instrumentality (a belief that high performance will result in getting promoted).

⁷⁰ Dr. Robert McClary, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 27 April 2017.

Recent Research

Three Command and General Staff Officer's College students have written Master's thesis on measuring potential with the current OER, talent management, and the Army promotion process. These writers have completed a substantial amount of work detailing and researching the intricacies of these three topics in depth. It is worth reviewing and gleaning the results of their work and how it contributes to the research question here within.

In 2013, Major Melanie Kirchhoff researched whether the Army encourages or rewards competence in officer ranks. Some of the most salient points from her research involve the collection and assessment of competence, OER and board process effectiveness, and overall perspectives of talent management by currently serving officers. For purposes of data collection, Major Kirchhoff interviewed and surveyed a cross section of officers from the ranks of Major through Brigadier General.⁷¹

The results of her surveys and interviews concluded that the Army has a myriad of objective and subjective means of evaluating competence via military education schools, OERs, and counseling. Although there are a lot of good tools mentioned, she identifies a consistent problem with effective usage or implementation—for instance, counseling, the Army's MSAF program, and the old OER were cited as failing systems.⁷² It was determined that the previous OER was “inflated...[but] the new OERs are well

⁷¹ Major Melanie Kirchhoff, “Competence as a Professional Imperative: Does the Army Promote Competence in its Officers?” (Master's thesis, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2013), 32.

⁷² Ibid., 61.

designed and provide the opportunity to rate officers more accurately.”⁷³ Despite the initial optimism, there were doubts as to if the new OER would be able to provide insights into certain components of competence, specifically, “adaptability, self-awareness, interpersonal skills and character qualities.”⁷⁴ Four years after the publication of this thesis, these doubts are realized and some of the same complaints of the old OER prevail.

Interestingly, perceptions as to the effectiveness of the OER differed by rank. Senior leaders surveyed strongly supported the argument that the OER adequately differentiates officers, while only 29 percent of CGSOC students had confidence in the evaluation. One potential reason for the lack of confidence by mid-level officers, according to Major Kirchhoff is, “small numbers of incompetent officers being promoted into all levels of the Army officer corps... because ‘mission accomplishment’ is [often] equated with ‘competent.’”⁷⁵ Respondents also near unanimously believed that incompetence is tolerated in the Army due to a lack of candid counseling, no assessment of interpersonal skills, and a lack of moral character.⁷⁶ A lot can be interpreted by assessing the converging and diverging responses to questions based on rank and seniority.

⁷³ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 62.

Major Kirchhoff uncovers many noteworthy concerns within the Army officer corps. The suggested reasons and potential solutions are congruent with historical norms of how the Army has addressed similar concerns. The optimistic approach toward the—at the time—new OER, is very telling. The same symptoms persist, despite attempts to fix what is perceived to be broken.

Major Joshua Long identified four deficiencies on the talent management subject in his 2015 thesis. According to his research, the breakdown starts with the lack of clear, objective definitions for key words that can be linked to personnel management and assessments.⁷⁷ The second deficiency occurs when the poorly defined terms are used in an OER lacking criteria that is, “measurable, assessable, and recordable [or] in a format that captures the officer’s performance and potential as it applies to talent management principles and definitions.”⁷⁸ Major Long advocates for a more holistic approach to assessing officer performance and potential, particularly by HRC to leverage branch-specific requirements. Lastly, Major Long suggests that the career timeline requires revision to eliminate “meeting gates within the same rigid framework.”⁷⁹ His research suggests refining the up-or-out policy to promote based on skills and requirements would increase organizational productivity and incentivize officer performance. Undergirding Major Long’s premise is a plea for talent management practices to match its principles and for promotion output to match senior leader guidance.

⁷⁷ Major Joshua Long, “Talent Management: Bridging the Gap” (Master’s thesis, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS. 2015), 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 55.

Major Derrick Jackson focused his 2015 research on the OER's ability to effectively measure officer potential. In his research, he recognizes several important considerations. Jackson identified the problem with the Army's effectiveness at capturing potential is due to how decision makers use the OER, the lack of a clear definition for potential, and the grouping of all officers of the same grade, regardless of branch, or function into the same assessment pool.⁸⁰

The research identified inconsistencies and problems with how senior raters are required to provide assessments and evaluations, leading to various levels of fairness and subjectivity.”⁸¹ He believed this can be remediated in part through providing senior raters with better guidance on how to assess along with methods to measure potential. Unfortunately, this proposed solution was refuted earlier in this chapter by other studies that subjectivity cannot be remedied through additional training and guidance.

Major Jackson found that Senior leaders' opinion of potential are “hampered, in many instances by the lack of proximity, numbers of personnel... assessed, and the lack of objective assessments,” therefore it is imperative to gain a greater emphasis on objective assessments.⁸² This identified problem and the recommended solution corroborate with a multitude of studies already addressed within this chapter.

Lastly, Major Jackson's research identified a precedence of superior evaluations is often based off seniority and officer promotion timeline rather than performance or

⁸⁰ Derrick Jackson, “Measuring Officer Potential Using the OER” (Master's thesis, Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2015), 30.

⁸¹ Ibid., 53.

⁸² Ibid., 31.

potential.⁸³ An example of this occurs when an officer receives a COM OER initially at a new duty station so that someone who has served longer can receive an ACOM. The expectation is that officers who have been in a unit longer and / or are in key developmental positions will receive the ACOM OERs. This is another way the data becomes skewed and not a good reflection of potential. If the senior rater is given the responsibility to evaluate a given officer's potential, then there should be a corresponding repercussion for failing to make an accurate assessment.

Responsibility requires ownership and accountability. If a senior rater is responsible, should he or she also have some culpability for failing to make an accurate assessment? Many would argue against having any culpability on the senior rater; however, an argument against this is an argument against senior leaders having responsibility. Which senior officer would be more likely to make a proper assessment of potential? The one who does initial, quarterly, and periodic counseling with rigorous metrics for expectations upon which to evaluate, or the one who ignores these duties? The senior rater who is personally involved in officer development and builds professional relationships with the subordinates, or the leader who stands aloof, more focused on personal accomplishments and gains? Forcing responsibility into the hands of senior leaders may serve to self-correct other climate and didactic areas of concern around the Army.

Clear elements of unfairness outside the rater or senior rater's control were also identified in the evaluation system. Ranking officers within a given unit and comparing

⁸³ Ibid., 33.

those results against all other officers in the force is one such example.⁸⁴ Some units may have a higher potential pool than other units; the 75th Ranger Regiment or 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, for example. In some instances, this can serve or hinder an officer depending upon the talent pool and unit circumstances.

Many officers have fundamentally different expectations, functionalities, and specialties so comparing the peers in the same organization is like comparing apples to oranges.⁸⁵ Different branches have different professional requirements, skills, schooling, needs and expectations for officers. Interestingly, the Army does compare some officers by branch or specialty, Major General (Retired) Waff points out, “Warrants, and officers in the 42C (Army band) and 47 (Academy Professor) MOS fields do not compete against other officers outside their specialty.”⁸⁶ This would be ideal for officers in all specialties across the Army so that “oranges compete with oranges.”⁸⁷ Unfortunately, it would require many additional boards and a lot more money. It should stand to reason that evaluations and promotions should have a branch specific component to them in order to prevent the unintended consequence of comparing apples to oranges.

There is a lack of trust in the Army’s ability to manage talent and fix the problem to do it better. One example is evident through the perception of 250 surveyed officers across six cohorts of whom 94 percent believe “the Army does a good job of retaining the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁶ Major General William D. R. Waff, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 10 March 2017.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

best leaders” and 93 percent believe the “best officers leave the military early rather than serving a full career.”⁸⁸ Similar negative responses were found with respect to the Army’s ability to promote the right people to General, weed out weak leaders, matching talent with jobs, and incentivizing entrepreneurial leaders. Surprisingly, however, only 55 percent of the same respondents thought the military personnel system should be radically transformed.⁸⁹ This implies that the respondents know there is a problem, but do not believe the problem can be solved, or do not trust the Army’s ability to fix it effectively.

Considerations for the Future Force

Since 1973, when the Army turned away from the draft and became an all-volunteer force, it has had to rely more on positive incentives to invest in its personnel and retain talent. Recent changes to the Army personnel system will confound the problems of retaining the best leadership even further. The new retirement plan set forth for future cohorts of officers will provide little to no incentive to progress until twenty years of service. If fewer officers want or desire to stay in until twenty years, the Army will not have a problem with identifying who is ‘best qualified’ to achieve successive ranks. Instead, the problem will become more focused on ensuring enough personnel are retained to fill the required positions. Thus, retaining talent and managing personnel will be of increasing importance in the future, particularly if too many officers request to resign their commission. The Army can always refuse to allow these officers to leave, but

⁸⁸ Kane, 14.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

the disenfranchisement associated with forcibly retaining large quantities of mid-level leaders could expectedly have negative consequences. The greater the population of disenfranchised officers, the greater this problem will become and the more the Army will be inclined to increase the length of commissioning contracts. The Army must change because it cannot afford to offer retirement at any age with the current percentages of disgruntled officers.

This concern does not imply that officer preferences should take priority over the needs of the Army. On the contrary, the needs of the Army are essential and should always have the highest of priority. However, the needs of the Army are not accurately considered because no assessment is being implemented. The DA Secretariat is not authorized to release the OML results of the board process to any outside sources other than the Army G1, even though the results are completely changed based on statute and regulation.⁹⁰ So, branch assignment managers develop their own, less sophisticated and more apt for bias process for identifying talent. They assign senior Captains or junior Majors to locations based on a crude match up of what units want, what the officer wants, and the ranking of that officer.⁹¹ If the same unit wants too many of the best talented officers, then the branch assignment officer will deliberately send some of those officers to other locations in order to distribute the talent and ensure they all have a chance of

⁹⁰ Captain Kevin Beavers, Officer Promotions, interview by author, DA Secretariat, Fort Knox, KY, 22 March 2017.

⁹¹ Major General Wilson Shoffner, “New AIM Pilot Program” (Lecture, Marshall Auditorium, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 9 December 2016).

receiving evaluations that will facilitate their advancement.⁹² If assessments were conducted more thoroughly and effectively using a robust data base of skills, capabilities, knowledge, and requirements, the results would be to the Army's and most individual's benefit.⁹³

The Army's Talent Management Task Force is currently attempting to do this through the implementation of the Integrated Personnel and Pay System-Army (IPPS-A) and Assignment Interactive Module 2 (AIM2) systems. Unfortunately, these systems are not robust enough to maximize the opportunity present by high-tech, computer-based, algorithms that can combine all data from an individual's record to assist in identifying where he or she is most likely to succeed, meet the needs of the Army, and fulfill career requirements.

The current product relies heavily on individual officer inputs and not enough on the data already present, nor is it a self-learning and adapting program which can predict future potential. If the Army could leverage talents already in existence, it would require less time and money for training or correcting mistakes from individuals less suited for those jobs. This is in the Army's best interest and if the needs of the Army are truly a priority, then a robust evaluation system should be implemented to ensure maximization of its resources.

⁹² Captain Assignment Officer 1, interview by author, Human Resources Command (HRC), Fort Knox, KY, 23 March 2017.

⁹³ Major Assignment Officer 3, interview by author, Human Resources Command (HRC), Fort Knox, KY, 23 March 2017.

Chapter Summary

This study is a needed addition to the knowledge in the field. There is clearly a wealth of information on perceived and identified problems, biases, unfairness and misrepresentations regarding promotions, evaluations, and personnel management. The accumulation of bad practices has taken its toll on leaders across the Army with junior officers and recently passed-over officers hit the hardest. There is a lack of trust and confidence in the system and this can manifest in many negative ways. All research provides possible solutions and recommendations which will fix or attempt to fix the various symptoms. Some of these proposed solutions are very accurate, but will only solve a small part of the problem. The main takeaways from this chapter, which must be included in order to create a more effective and viable solution are:

1. An evaluation validation test to ensure the Army is measuring what it claims to measure.
2. The OER is necessary for productivity, but by being tied to assessments for promotions it becomes skewed and no longer accurate. An adjustment is needed to account for or mitigate this tendency.
3. Officers tend to promote individuals most like themselves (like-me bias).
4. The best leaders develop subordinates who know what is expected of them and feel that they have a chance to do what they do best every day.
5. The most effective leaders are identified as the best from subordinates, but are humble themselves.
6. Most products are the result of a collaborative effort; measuring one person by the work of many is not accurate. Context matters and mitigation factors

ought to be included to accurately assess the impact the individual in question had, rather than contributions by others.

7. Evaluations speak more of the individual conducting the rating. One way to capitalize on this is to invert the ratings.
8. Increasing the number of criteria being evaluated increases the accuracy of the findings and decreases the subjectivity as long as the criteria relates to the objective.
9. Forcing senior raters to be accountable to the accuracy of their assessments of potential may serve to make some more involved, attentive, and less biased. It may also serve to reduce rating inflation, increase counseling, and improve leader development while in command and into the future.
10. Active duty Captains should be compared against peers within the same branch for promotion, not necessarily the same year group like what is done for 42C and 47 (Academy Professors). In some cases, officers should be compared to sub-populations within a specified branch.

The research thus far identifies that the current Army system for promoting Captains to Major fails to promote objectively with any form of consistency. It relies heavily on OERs, which by the nature of being tied to promotions, invalidates them as an unbiased tool. Furthermore, the information presented in the first two chapters demonstrate that the order of merit lists are not based on merit, but rather seniority and arbitrary criteria such as birthdates and social security numbers. The primary research question is therefore answered, the current active duty Army system does not accurately consider the Secretary of the Army's guidance to promote objectively and merit-based

Captains with the greatest amount of potential. Secondly, by maintaining the current method of promotion evaluation for officers, the Army will continue to erode trust within its ranks. This lack of trust negatively impacts effectiveness and efficiency.

The ten factors on the previous page also help to answer the third research question. In order for an objective, merit-based, automated evaluation system to be effectively implemented, it must abide by the ten components addressed as conclusions to the literary review. These criteria serve as a guiding litmus test to facilitate solving the secondary research question.

Gaps in the Research

This thesis must propose a solution which has the potential of correcting all the various underlying problems that relate to the categories mentioned on the previous page, eliminate the symptoms, and answer the secondary research questions effectively. If the proposal can accomplish this it could serve to rebuild trust within the system and across the Army by bolstering leaders' and Soldiers' competence, character, and commitment toward a new system—one that is objective, merit-based, automated, and enhances effectiveness of talent management.

The remaining question, which must still be answered is: How can the Army balance the costs associated with consolidating information on candidates with the accuracy of assessing the talent the Army wants? This question will be the primary consideration for data collection in chapter 4. Additionally, gaining various Army perspectives on the first and third research questions may help to uncover additional factors for consideration of a viable solution.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I will collect information through direct engagements with persons through interviews and surveys. First, I will collect information from various officers, Soldiers and DA Civilians from the DA Secretariat (including board recorders), Promotions and Evaluations office, and The Adjutant General (TAG) from within HRC. This information will serve two purposes. First, it will expand the knowledge that could not be ascertained readily from the literature review. Speaking directly with them provides real-time situational understanding of today's systems, the policies and procedures regarding their execution, and removes interpretation of documents from the equation. Secondly, it allows an opportunity to reconcile questions that were brought up through the literature review, particularly the ten points identified as essential for an effective evaluation process by those responsible for the process. Up until now, I have not heard a counter-argument to many of the largely negative articles on the subject.

Balance must be achieved prior to going into interviews and asking more poignant questions concerning the problem. The two questions the information collection at Fort Knox will attempt to answer are: Does the current active duty Army system promote objectively and merit-based Captains with the greatest amount of potential? and How can the Army balance the costs associated with consolidating information on candidates with the accuracy of assessing the talent the Army wants? Please refer to Appendix D for a detailed description of questions while at HRC. Additionally, I may ask questions, depending on the answers I receive from Appendix B and C. It is very possible that what was previously identified as the problem may change following this gained information.

At a minimum, a reassessment and reflection will be necessary following these interviews and prior to moving forward to retired General Officer interviews.

Once a reassessment is complete, and assuming no significant changes are necessary, additional interviews will commence. Interviews will be conducted with several retired General Officers of various backgrounds who have served previously on Major promotion boards. The purpose of interviewing these senior leaders is to gain insights and further understanding of unknown nuances to the inner problems not otherwise identified from research. Secondly, the interviews with senior leaders will help distinguish and vet proposed solutions to ensure what is included in chapter 5 is suitable, acceptable, and feasible by senior Army Leader standards. The two research questions, which these interviews will primarily comprise are: Does the current active duty Army system promote objectively and merit-based Captains with the greatest amount of potential? and Can and how would an objective, merit-based, automated evaluation system be implemented in the Army Officer promotion system to improve effectiveness of talent management? Please refer to Appendix B for a copy of the interview questions.

There is risk in not acquiring the most current assessment of issues or proposed solutions to issues since the interviews are with retired Generals versus currently serving Generals. However, the decision to interview retirees is born of five major balancing factors. First, retired Generals are less wed to, or feel compelled to tote the party line. That is, they may feel more liberated to provide a full account of personal opinions without reservation. Secondly, the timing of this study and restrictions on schedules limits the researcher from the flexibility required to interview actively serving Generals. Thirdly, by not interviewing currently serving Generals, the researcher avoids any

potential conflicts of interest for present or future job opportunities. It is also important to note that the requirement for evaluating potential for promotion is not restricted to just the Army or Department of Defense professions. Therefore, regardless of time since an individual was serving, the opinions or recommendations for how to effectively evaluate potential remain just as relevant as a perspective to be noted and or considered. Lastly, time for reflection is an integral component to critical and creative thinking. The researcher assumes there may be more opportunity for reflection with a retired General than one currently serving, although this may not always be the case. Based on these five factors, the researcher felt it best to focus on the population of retired Generals for focused interviews.

A survey of a cross section of officers could not be conducted unfortunately. The opportunity to gain perspective and input, which might either support or oppose the thesis topic by currently serving Captains, Majors, Lieutenant Colonels, and retired Lieutenant Colonels is unfortunately not present due to restrictions placed on the researcher. I do highly suggest further research be conducted in this manner to confirm perceptions by these populations as to whether: The Army could stifle trust, effectiveness, and efficiency by continuing its current method of promotion evaluation for officers, and the current active duty Army system promotes objectively and merit-based Captains with the greatest amount of potential. The survey could also help to identify potential trust or lack thereof in an objective, merit-based, automated evaluation system implemented to improve effectiveness of talent management and the promotion system.

Regardless of the results of the interviews and questionnaires, the need for change within the Army's current system is apparent through the multitude of research and

responses from various Army surveys like the CASAL. However, responses at various levels help to shed light as to viable potential options for the researcher's proposals. By targeting a wide range of officers from three separate ranks, the researcher will identify patterns, similarities, and divergences between the groups.

The interviews will attempt to target as many officers and subject matter experts as possible. The survey will be voluntary and respondents will remain anonymous. Recommendations will be compiled and considered against the ten criteria identified at the end of chapter 2. As the various suggested ideas develop into strong collaborated recommendations, each new interviewee will receive the collaborated suggestion(s) at the end of the interview. He or she will be asked to substantiate the validity, identify problems, and potential improvements. Therefore, the recommendation(s) will grow over time and improve with the gained experience and knowledge of those who participated.

Lastly, I will speak to a few ARCIC employees connected to CGSOC. This is of particular importance due to the current proposed changes with the Army's Talent Management Task Force, which is addressing the concerns of improving officer management through a greater degree of focus on skills, knowledge, and experience. These discussions will contribute to answering the research questions: Could the Army stifle productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency by continuing its current method of promotion evaluation for officers? and How can the Army balance the costs associated with consolidating information on candidates with the accuracy of assessing the talent the Army wants? There is noticeable trepidation by many currently serving officers to change the current system, regardless of the number of scathing articles suggesting it is necessary. The discussions with ARCIC may increase awareness as to the identified

reasons why the Army is currently changing and if it has identified the same or similar concerns I have over the course of the research gathered.

Collectively the interviews and surveys will be structured to focus on the following topics:

1. Does the current promotion evaluation system accurately identify high-potential officers by merit?
2. In what ways has the current system failed to promote the best officers?
3. What delineates potential in an officer?
4. How can potential be measured, besides through an OER?
5. Do the Army OMLs accurately organize individuals by merit or potential?
6. Should Soldiers be ranked in OMLs by order of merit?
7. What might keep an OER from accurately depicting true potential?
8. How does a board decipher between poor performance and a personality conflict in an OER or other bias?
9. What are some biases or perceived biases that can contribute to a board's assessment of a file?
10. What are potential problems with moving the Army toward a computer-based promotion evaluation system?

Each of the ten components identified from the research at the end of chapter 2 will be combined with additional relevant concerns discovered in chapter 4. Collectively, these factors will be evaluated against the proposed recommendations developed from the analysis of data. The potential of success of each solution will be based on the ability of it to solve or resolve all concerns addressed from the research. If a potential solution does

not pass the ten components from chapter 2, it will be deemed as not suitable and therefore not relevant to this Thesis. However, there also may be the case that diverging facts result in evidence which contradicts one of the ten components. In either case, I will address the facts of each side and attempt to unbiasedly evaluate based on the credits and allow the reader to decide.

There are several components which strengthen this methodology. First, it acknowledges there is a problem without assigning blame. The researcher also acknowledges that little to no information collected supported the current system and therefore, the insights gained by Army leaders may refute some of the data provided by research. This method focuses on a specific problem and allows for various perceptions to be consolidated and collected that might shed light as to potential solutions, otherwise not considered. It also gains higher level perspective through the interview process. Through these interviews, the researcher will confirm or deny whether officers in various positions are aware, have considered, or agree with the findings of the research conducted. Lastly, this leverages the knowledge and experience of senior leaders and subject matter experts to contribute thoughts, ideas, and recommendations toward possible improvements.

There are a few weaknesses to this methodology. One weakness is it assumes that the best answer is found from the collection of suggestions from respondents, or more specifically, that the respondents' suggestions hold equal weight to the results of research conducted following the scientific method. Without the ability to survey large populations of Captains through Lieutenant Colonels, the study will not consolidate the collective concerns and compare them to previous studies conducted over time with

CASAL. By not being able to survey recently retired Lieutenant Colonels, this method will not be able to expand upon the CASAL survey by gaining the perspective of officers who either chose to retire or were forced to retire. Lastly, the interviews and surveys provided were written and will be delivered by the researcher, hence this is not a blind study. Potential biases of the researcher could influence the respondents' responses and or how the responses are interpreted. Lastly, the researcher may be subject to several potential thinking traps or psychological fallacies to include: sunk cost or relevancy bias. The best way to mitigate these fallacies is by being aware of them and keeping copious notes and periodically reviewing those notes to mitigate against these errors.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DISCOVERIES

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.⁹⁴

— Albert Einstein, 1955

A total of nineteen individuals were interviewed in the execution of collecting information pertaining to this research. Fourteen of the individuals were selected based on their subject matter expertise with respect to what the Army is currently doing. These fourteen individuals consisted of leaders and executers among HRC to include: the DA Secretariat, Promotions and Evaluations, Branch Assignment Officers, TAG, DMPM, and members of the recent Human Dimension Task Force. The other five individuals interviewed were retired General Officers. These senior leaders possess the knowledge and experience necessary to manage large organizations. They appreciate and have a greater understanding of the social, economic, and political factors which help determine viability and feasibility of potential courses of action impacting the entire Army. While not all of the responses were identical, it is important to note where converging and diverging thoughts existed and by which agency. The absence of counter perspectives in the remaining chapter implies unanimity of opinion. These interviews additionally served to increase the researcher's base of knowledge considerably.

⁹⁴ Albert Einstein, "Quote Investigator: Exploring the Origins of Quotations," Quote Investigator, 6 April 2013, accessed 15 March 2017, <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/04/06/fish-climb/>.

Results of Interviews

The promotion board does not calibrate. There is no attempt to standardize individual board members with other board members. It is encouraged for every board member to use an individual voting philosophy to assess each candidate's file.⁹⁵ Every board member works at their own pace to assess every candidate's file.⁹⁶ This is true even of the boards in the 1980s and 90s. However, it is not uncommon for all board members to assess "twenty to thirty [dummy] files on the first day in order to gain practice and help each board member develop their picture."⁹⁷ These assessments get thrown out and all the files are reassessed eventually. This initial scrub allows each board member to identify exactly what he or she is looking for and how to grade so that the rest of the assessments can be completed exactly to the same individual standard. As with everything else, these assessments are not shared. Board members are not allowed to discuss their individual methods with anyone to include other board members.

The lack of a calibration is important because it shows there is no attempt by the Army to standardize expectations of what to evaluate or how to evaluate. It is acknowledged that all board members have different perspectives and may assess files using different matrices. This is encouraged over the alternatives of one individual standard, common metrics, or divvying up components of a file so each board member assess something different. The concern is if there was a common standard, all officers

⁹⁵ GS14 in Officer Promotions, interview by author, Department of Army Secretariat, Fort Knox, KY, 22 March 2017.

⁹⁶ Beavers, Officer Promotions, interview.

⁹⁷ Brigadier General, telephone interview by author, 19 April 2017.

would pursue improving only the components of that metric.⁹⁸ The other important takeaway is that two to three additional hours is required for each board member to become adjusted to their own technique.

Bias

The number of board members on a typical Major promotion board varies. Recent examples range from eleven to seventeen;⁹⁹ the only requirement by law is it must be greater than five.¹⁰⁰ The Army G1 through the DMPM identifies board member characteristics they want represented within a given board. The DA Secretariat fills slots based on those characteristics. Sometimes one individual can fulfill multiple characteristics. Examples of criteria may include: race, gender, Army component, branch, joint, and rank.¹⁰¹ For instance, multiple criteria can be achieved by having a Black Female Brigadier General from a Force Sustainment unit in the National Guard present on the board. The number of board members is not necessarily correlated with the number of board files, but it is considered. The purpose behind the characteristics is to

⁹⁸ Department of Military Personnel Management (DMPM) Lieutenant Colonel, interview by author, Fort Knox, KY, 22 March 2017.

⁹⁹ GS14 Officer Promotions, interview.

¹⁰⁰ Department of Military Personnel Management DA Civilian, interview by author, Fort Knox, KY, 21 April 2017.

¹⁰¹ GS14 Officer Promotions, interview.

ensure that a given board is representative of the greater Army population. This helps to limit the impact of personal bias from any one given board member.¹⁰²

This is important because the implication is that the Army recognizes the potential for a ‘similar to me’ bias amongst board members. Increasing the diversity of the board helps the Army mitigate this bias.¹⁰³ What the Army chooses to identify as the characteristics to diversify relates to what the Army sees as potential bias areas. Interestingly, a leader from the DA Secretariat contradicted this potential view point by stating that “Every board member is expected to assess and evaluate files professionally and without bias.”¹⁰⁴ If this is true, then it is an unreasonable expectation placed on board members. The fact that all individuals have biases is confirmed in a multitude of studies. In fact, the more these biases are not realized, the more prevalent and unconscious they tend to be.¹⁰⁵ Of all senior leaders interviewed, not one believed the board process is without bias. Albeit, there were varying levels of comfort with the mitigation factors currently in place.¹⁰⁶ A better question is: what are the largest conscious or subconscious biases amongst board members today and are these the same characteristics the Army

¹⁰² Department of Military Personnel Management Captain 2, interview by author, Fort Knox, KY, 22 March 2017.

¹⁰³ GS14 Officer Promotions, interview.

¹⁰⁴ DMPM Lieutenant Colonel, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Annie Murphy Paul, “Where bias Begins: The Truth About Stereotypes,” *Psychology Today* (1 May 1998), accessed 14 May 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199805/where-bias-begins-the-truth-about-stereotypes>.

¹⁰⁶ Two out of seven General Officers and only one mid-level officer interviewed were satisfied with the Army’s cognitive bias mitigation techniques. All interviewees believed the Army ought to minimize bias to the greatest extent possible.

chooses to mitigate? Without answering this question, the Army is either making a large assumption as to what needs to be mitigated, or is paying lip-service toward bias prevention. It is not likely the senior leaders are as unaware of cognitive bias as the officer quoted above assumes, otherwise there would not be a reason to have more than five board members.

Having a larger number of board members all evaluating the same files helps to mitigate the potential for any one member's bias to have a significant impact on any one file. One DA civilian working for officer promotions division who wanted to remain anonymous said, "When there is a significant divergence between board members on a given file, it is usually because one of them knows the individual and has personal information not available to the other board members."¹⁰⁷ When these significantly diverging evaluations occur, the file will be sent back to both or all board members involved in the divergent assessment for reevaluation. The board president will determine the rules at the beginning, but usually it is identified as a four-point gap or greater. For instance, if one board member assesses a file as a 'two' and three other board members assess the same file as a 'six,' all four board members will receive the file over again to potentially reevaluate their initial assessment. No one is required to change their scores, but this does allow them to know that at least one other anonymous board member had a significantly different opinion of the board file in question.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ GS14 Officer Promotions, interview.

¹⁰⁸ Beavers, Officer Promotions, interview.

The number of possible data points that could bias a board member depends on what information the board member has access to in a file and what he or she chooses to see or focus on.¹⁰⁹ However, the board members see everything in the individual's performance file to include OERs, academic evaluation reports (AERs), ORB, DA Photo, awards/certificates, and all information there within. Although board members have access to everything, "they do not necessarily look at all information or open all files. . . . They look at as much information as is necessary to make a determination of potential based on their own voter philosophy."¹¹⁰ When asked what biases do you think are most prevalent on a given promotion board, responses from senior leaders included:

1. The DA photo x 3
2. Gender x 3
3. Commissioning source x 2
4. Assignments x 2
5. Specific units x 2
6. Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) vs FORSCOM x 2
7. Race x 2
8. Ethnicity x 2
9. Overseas duty x 2
10. Confirmation bias
11. Like-me bias

¹⁰⁹ Former Human Dimension Task Force DA Civilian, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 27 April 2017.

¹¹⁰ GS14 Officer Promotions, interview.

12. Religion
13. Language
14. Head dresses
15. Prejudice against combat arms or service support
16. Schools
17. Component
18. Tattoos.
19. Negative bias against AFPAC Hands¹¹¹

These responses represent current perceptions of known, or possible unconscious biases from only a micro-fraction of the Army's force. "I believe there is a tendency in any profession that is defined by a code of ethics and oversight to move in a direction of confirmation bias," suggests Lieutenant General (Retired) David Huntoon. We want to see "people who move in the same direction that we did and promote those that remind us of ourselves or have had similar experiences."¹¹² In fact, only one officer out of all individuals interviewed, did not believe that biases influence board members' decisions. One respondent noted, "General Officer misconduct helps to confirm some biases that have not gone away."¹¹³

Recommended solutions to mitigate common cognitive biases include:

¹¹¹ All General Officers and senior leaders and DA Civilians from DMPM except one identified at least one potential bias.

¹¹² Huntoon, interview.

¹¹³ Brigadier General Philip Mattox, telephone interview by the author, 19 April 2017.

1. SHARP training
2. Remove pictures from being seen by board members
3. Remove all unnecessary data from ORB/ OERs that are visible to the board x2
4. More standardized job descriptions
5. Better instruction and knowledge on the challenges of positions.¹¹⁴

It is important to note that one General and two senior leaders from the Army G1 did not believe additional actions needed to be taken to mitigate biases. The size and diversity of the board was cited as sufficiently capable to mitigate bias, as does guidance from senior leadership. One G1 respondent noted that the Air Force attempted to mitigate bias by taking away the photo, but it turned out to have a negative effect.¹¹⁵ This individual referenced a study conducted by MG McConville to determine the validity and effectiveness of the DA photo for the Army. He cited, “ninety-nine percent of the board members supported keeping the picture because they felt it was an initial handshake.”¹¹⁶

Brigadier General (Retired) Philip Mattox points out that the “Air Force allows for more personal bias by doing local boards. There may be some merit to their system. Instead of looking at 5000 records, the Air Force board is only looking at a couple hundred.”¹¹⁷ While he presents a much different perspective on bias than the

¹¹⁴ All senior leaders believed the best way to mitigate biases were through doing one of the five items listed or were unsure as the best approach. The Army has already attempted points 1, 4, and 5. The Air Force attempted points 2 and 3.

¹¹⁵ DMPM DA Civilian, interview.

¹¹⁶ Department of Military Personnel Management DA Civilian, interview.

¹¹⁷ Mattox, interview.

contemporary Army narrative, his argument is thought provoking. What is more important to the board process: eliminating all bias or increasing thoroughness of a holistic approach? Is it possible to get both?

A different perspective came from an individual who had previously worked on the Human Dimension Task Force. The Army could greatly benefit from the field of Ontology. Ontology is the study of determining the attributes which represent the focus of study verses that which is superfluous.¹¹⁸ For instance, this is often well executed in the music industry.

When a musician auditions for the symphony, he or she plays an instrument behind a curtain so that the judges cannot see the individual or know the name. The intent is to deprive the judges of the information that is not relevant to quality. What are the attributes that represent something verses that which is superfluous?¹¹⁹

By providing, race, gender, picture, ethnicity, religion, home town, names and other arbitrary information which does not contribute to performance, the Army allows for irrelevant information to unnecessarily bias board members.

The Army G1 through the DA Secretariat clearly contributes significant amounts of time and energy to make the board process as fair and equitable as possible. The efforts to mitigate bias, prevent group think, eliminate outside influences on board decisions, and maximize opportunity for board members to work at their own pace are well thought out and effective. Furthermore, studies of a cross-section of the officer

¹¹⁸ Tom Gruber, "Toward Principles for the Design of Ontologies Used for Knowledge Sharing?," *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 43, no. 4-5 (November 1995): 907-928, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www-ksl.stanford.edu/kst/what-is-an-ontology.html>.

¹¹⁹ Human Dimension Task Force DA Civilian, interview.

population supports the assertion that this process is not perfect, but close with respect to race, gender, and ethnicity bias. High performing female officers seem to have higher floors and lower ceilings with respect to BZ promotions to Major and Lieutenant Colonel, but have increased odds to receiving a battalion command slot.¹²⁰ High performing minority officers were not treated differently than non-minority officers with BZ promotion rates to Major, however low performing minority officers may be punished more severely.¹²¹ BZ promotions for minority officers to Lieutenant Colonel were negatively correlated but positively correlated for Battalion Command slating and in both of these instances there was a higher floor for underperforming minorities. However, it is important to note that in all these cases the correlations were not statistically significant.¹²² The senior leaders interviewed identified far more potential areas of bias than what the individual from the Department of Military Personnel Management (DMPM) and DA Secretariat acknowledged as areas of concern for the Army. However, the fact that most senior leaders interviewed were self-aware enough to recognize the existence of potential cognitive bias, they are less likely to be negatively influenced.

The fairness of the board process and of the board members was echoed by the majority of individuals interviewed, despite acknowledgments that better systems may

¹²⁰ Spain, 48.

¹²¹ Ibid., 49.

¹²² Ibid.

exist or that there might be room for improvement.¹²³ The effects of bias swing like a pendulum as well and long-term success in the Army can sometimes be “the luck of the draw,” says Brigadier General (Retired) Philip Mattox. He points to a previous major military action for an example.

3ID and the 8th ID were a stay behind unit for Europe during Desert Storm. Many of us were already selected to go to CGSC. Those who were in Desert Storm, most often did not even leave Kuwait and never saw combat...As time went along, more of the people that did not go received promotions over those who did go. Those who did go lost opportunities to get jobs and did not receive OERs and were thus less competitive. In Desert Storm, it was better not to deploy.¹²⁴

This was true at Lieutenant Colonel, Major, and Captain levels, per the General. Today, it may be hard to imagine the Army weighing deployment experience with so little importance. It appears Soldiers and leaders are programmed to revere overseas deployment service over all others. However, regardless of our personal tendency to demonstrate deference toward an experience, that cognitive bias is not grounds for the experience being indicative of future potential.

Ratings

The board assess files using a rating scheme. Before any file is assessed, first the members predetermine what they will identify as the minimum score for the promotion. Most often the lowest score is a three (-).¹²⁵ If there are eleven board members, then

¹²³ Despite the stated desire by the majority of interviewees who thought change was necessary, all had a high level of confidence in the attempted fairness and equity of the process and those who partake in it.

¹²⁴ Mattox, interview.

¹²⁵ Beavers, Officer Promotions, interview.

every file must receive at least thirty-three points with (thirty-three minuses) or greater to be considered for promotion. If a file receives a score of one, a “show for cause” is initiated; this is rare.¹²⁶ If eight board members assess a particular file to be a two, the individual could still be considered for promotion if the remaining three board members assess the same file as a six.¹²⁷ However, being above the minimum threshold does not necessarily guarantee promotion. Likewise, someone who is under the threshold (thirty-two in the scenario provided above) could still get promoted based on the needs of the Army.¹²⁸ If someone holds a particular specialty the Army requires, he or she could still be promoted or not as the case may be. Therefore, the needs of the Army trump the exact order of merit identified by the board.

Regulations do not often adjust the board process, but when they do, the changes tend to be significant. According to an anonymous employee of the promotions and evaluations branch, a change in the 1970s, “which kept board members from talking to each other was implemented to prevent promotions based on the good-old-boy system.”¹²⁹ This and a similarly further restriction placed in 2002, reduced communications with board members and professionalized the system of seeking merit

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ The aggregate score would be: $8 \times 2 = 16$ & $3 \times 6 = 18$; $16 + 18 = 34$. Thirty-four is greater than thirty-three, therefore the candidate could still be considered for promotion.

¹²⁸ Beavers, Officer Promotions, interview.

¹²⁹ GS14 in Officer Promotions, interview.

over network.¹³⁰ It also had the effect of making the process of assessing files streamlined and more efficient. Race and gender used to be considered by board members who would receive target percentages. This practice was eliminated following a 1995 Supreme Court decision which identified it as an illegal act of discrimination.¹³¹ Since then, no affirmative action policies have taken place with respect to promotion or command selection boards. These legal or regulatory-level changes have shown a profound and positive impact toward the pursuit of enhancing the value of merit and eliminating overt bias discrimination within the board process.

Less significant changes to the promotion board process occur with greater frequency. These changes are dictated by DMPM and are often based on recommendations identified by the board members' after action report (AAR). These AARs are collected at DMPM and are not releasable. However, common complaints of board members may shed some light as to comments in the AARs.

1. Senior raters write poor evaluations for individuals identified as the best¹³²
2. The memorandum of instruction provided by the SECArmy is not sufficient to help clarify ambiguous issues.¹³³

¹³⁰ Kenneth Godfrey, Employee in Officer Promotions, interview by author, Department of Army Secretariat, Fort Knox, KY, 22 March 2017.

¹³¹ DMPM Lieutenant Colonel, interview.

¹³² Beavers, Officer Promotions, interview.

¹³³ Department of Military Personnel Management Captain 1, interview by author, Fort Knox, KY, 22 March 2017.

3. Percentages identified by senior rater do not match the number of people being rated.¹³⁴
4. The OERs lack precision of writing.¹³⁵
5. Word and ranking inflation by raters and senior raters.¹³⁶
6. OERs are not written effectively.¹³⁷

After the AARs are reviewed by DMPM, senior officials add additional information into the memorandum of instruction. The more AAR comments are submitted, the greater and more complex the memorandum of instruction becomes. It continues to grow each year and becomes increasingly difficult to discern.¹³⁸

Not all Captains in a cohort are assessed in the same board. Major promotion boards group officers of certain branches together. Examples of the various boards include: AMED, operational support branches, maneuver fires and effects branches, legal, and chaplains.¹³⁹ At higher ranks, the data believed to be most important for senior leaders transcends branch and therefore more branches are grouped together into boards.

¹³⁴ DMPM Captain 1, interview.

¹³⁵ GS14 Officer Promotions, interview.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Beavers, Officer Promotions, interview.

¹³⁸ GS14 Officer Promotions, interview.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Assessment Time

There is too little time allocated for current board members to assess all information in board files.¹⁴⁰ The less time available to evaluate relevant data on the individual, the greater the potential for subconscious bias to influence the assessments. As one Major General who asked to remain anonymous pointed out, “The more competitive the board is, the more time it takes [for board members] to really focus efforts.”¹⁴¹ The upcoming Major promotion board will be held over a twenty-three-day period, eighteen of which will occur during normal work-week days. Each file will receive an average assessment time of one minute fourteen seconds.¹⁴² Sometimes board members are not fast enough with their evaluations and end up working longer hours, Lieutenant General (Retired) David Huntoon points out. “Some board members stay very late because there is a sense of commitment. It is an honor to be on a board. [Board members] are entrusted with a great responsibility.”¹⁴³ This additional time is allocated for them. However, this is also the exception as most board members can meet the timelines.¹⁴⁴ How much information can be accurately weighed and assessed in one

¹⁴⁰ The General Officers who have experienced Captain, Major, or Lieutenant Colonel boards believed suggested two to four minutes per board file was a sufficient amount of time.

¹⁴¹ Major General (Retired), telephone interview by author, 17 April 2017.

¹⁴² Assuming the average board member works an eight-hour day assessing the 7000 board files. This does not account for breaks that board members take at their own digression. The days, number of board files and hours of work per day were disclosed by anonymous employees of the DA Secretariat.

¹⁴³ Huntoon, interview.

¹⁴⁴ DMPM Captain 2, interview.

minute and fourteen seconds? What is the appropriate amount of time? Responses from senior leaders trended toward two to four minutes.¹⁴⁵ The more time used to assess files, the more information can be considered.

There is a limit to how much one individual can accurately consider. There are over 600 words on an average Captain's ORB and roughly 1400 words on an average Captain's OER. Admittedly, board members do not read every single word of a given OER or ORB.¹⁴⁶ Counting only the words added and none of the words inherent to the form, ORBs have roughly 400 and OERs have 700 words.¹⁴⁷ If board members can gain a holistic assessment of individual officers through their past five OERs and ORB, it would require reading 3,900 words at a reading rate of 3170 words per minute. Considering the average American reads 200 words per minute with a comprehension of 60 percent, this does not seem possible.¹⁴⁸ College educated and well-read individuals have a slightly higher average of 300 words per minute with a comprehension of 65 percent.

Board members are not average American readers. Colonels and General Officers are inundated with large quantities of reading material every day and are required to

¹⁴⁵ Lust, Major General Larry, interview; Major General, interview; Brigadier General, interview.

¹⁴⁶ DMPM Captain 1, interview.

¹⁴⁷ These numbers were identified through an average of Captain OERs received and a personal ORB from when the researcher was a Captain.

¹⁴⁸ "Is Speed Reading for You?," Speed Reading Test Online, accessed 7 May 2017, <http://www.readingsoft.com>.

synthesize, assess, and extrapolate meaning in relatively short periods of time.¹⁴⁹

Assuming board members have double the average reading rate of 400 words per minute, in the allotted time only 8 percent of the total information would be assessed accurately.¹⁵⁰ If each board member were tasked to assess different components of a candidate's file, eleven board members could assess 90 percent of the total file. However, this would require changing current laws regulating boards and would negate the purpose of using multiple board members to reduce potential cognitive bias.

Limiting the information available to only what is relevant can also significantly reduce the time requirement. Eliminating the superfluous words identified by senior leaders earlier in this chapter as sources of potential bias, would decrease the word count by as much as 600 words. Reducing the total words in a file from 3900 to 3300 is a 15 percent reduction in the size of the board file and would save a board member roughly one and a half minutes.

Without changing law to dictate what information each board member is assigned, it becomes imperative that each board member can assess a greater percentage of the file. If every board member is expected to assess at least 25 percent of every file, it would require three minutes-ten seconds per file plus time to tabulate, assess, and assign a score. This is only slightly higher than the two to three-minute recommendation by senior leaders. Theoretically, the problem between time, information, and relevancy can be solved at the expense of efficiency and money.

¹⁴⁹ DMPM Captain 2, interview.

¹⁵⁰ $492 \text{ words can be read at } 65 \text{ percent comprehension out of } 3900 \text{ words. } (492 \times .65) / 3900 = 0.082$

Promotion Board Costs

The DA Secretariat has an annual budget to pay for board expenses. There are ninety boards conducted per year.¹⁵¹ To determine overall costs without access to the budget, conservative averages must be implemented. The following assumptions are based on averages provided by an anonymous officer in the DA Secretariat: An average Major board has eleven members, with an average rank of Colonel, and lasts an average of three weeks or twenty-three days.¹⁵² Eleven COLs TDY for twenty-three days to Fort Knox costs the Army nearly \$36,000.¹⁵³ Rental car transportation costs an additional \$19,200.¹⁵⁴ There is also a more elusive cost, that of work and productivity at the officers' unit. It is much more difficult to calculate the full weight of the absence of a key leader from a staff or command billet. However, one way to approach this is to say that an individual is paid for the knowledge, skill and expertise they provide in the execution of their duties. This unrealized cost to the Army for the board process is a minimum of \$85,600.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ DMPM Captain 1, interview.

¹⁵² GS14 Officer Promotions, interview.

¹⁵³ Headquarters, Department of Defense, "2017 Per Diem Rates Knox," Defense Travel Management Office, 1 January 2017, accessed 11 May 2017, <https://www.defense.travel.dod.mil/site/perdiemCalc.cfm>.

¹⁵⁴ The cheapest rental car fees for March 2017 in Fort Knox charged 74.20/day +39.00 in taxes. Taken from personal receipt.

¹⁵⁵ The Army associates pay with rank, and rank with position. The consequences of being absent from that position should have, at a minimum, an equivalent loss of pay for the associated time-period. Assuming the average board member has at least twenty-two years of service (the average time most individuals make Colonel), the base pay is \$10,318.80/ month as of 2017 pay charts. Assuming that the absence is only for twenty

There is also the cost incurred by the presence of the DA Secretariat and all employees who coordinate administratively for the board to take place. This office works around the clock, employing three separate teams of officers and civilians totaling forty-five personnel to cover frequent, multiple, simultaneous boards in various stages of planning, execution, and culmination. Considering the number and ranks of those in the office and dividing the total cost of salaries equally to the ninety separate boards, roughly \$31,800 is spent on each board including the Majors board.

One last factor remains to summarize total cost of the Major board. The cost to fly eleven officers round trip to Fort Knox from around the world can fluctuate between \$5,000 to over \$17,000. For simplicity sake, we will assume a set value of \$11,000.¹⁵⁶ The army spends roughly \$183,000 every year to conduct the Major promotion board. If similar costs are spent on the other eighty-nine boards each year, the total cost increases to \$16.47 million. It is therefore important the Army uses this time wisely and ensures it is as effective, accurate, and efficient as possible.

If the Army and DA Secretariat allowed each board member three minutes and ten seconds to assess each file (the required amount of time to accurately assess 25 percent of a given file), the cost would necessarily go up. The amount of time the average board would take would equate to 10 weeks. The cost of per diem would more than triple to \$109,000, rental car costs would increase to \$57,500, and the unrealized cost of the absence of the board members from their units would be \$260,500. The total new cost for

three days and not longer, the proportional amount of money given eleven Officers is \$85,589.

¹⁵⁶ This calculation assumes each officer's round trip airline ticket costs \$1,000.

a more accurate assessment would be \$470,000 for the Major's board and \$42.3 million over the course of an entire year. This additional \$25.8 million equates to a 257% increase in spending for an additional one minute and fifty-six seconds per board file and an increase in the quantity of what is assessed from 8 percent to 25 percent. Essentially every additional second a board member requires to assess a file equates to an increase of 0.15 percent of the file at a cost of roughly \$2,470 for the Major's board or \$222,000 for all boards. To increase the quantity of a file being reviewed by 1 percent, it requires an additional six point eight seconds per file at a cost of \$1.515 million.

If the size of the Army grows, the number of files to be assessed will necessarily increase and the overall cost for an accurate assessment would similarly raise. The additional \$25.8 million identified above only improves the accuracy of the assessment to 25 percent. This cost associated with time to assess board files is not sustainable. An additional 1,000 officers in a given Captain year group would increase the costs of the major board by \$469 million, for just that one board.¹⁵⁷ The alternative to spending such large quantities of money is to decrease accuracy by reducing the amount of time every board member spends assessing each file. Unfortunately, this is what has happened over the last twenty years and is the reason current board members have such little time to assess compared to previous boards in the 1990s.¹⁵⁸ Without increasing spending, the same increase in 1,000 officers would result in a reduction of twenty-four seconds per

¹⁵⁷ 1,000 officer files multiplied by 190s (3min 10sec) multiplied by \$2470= \$469 million.

¹⁵⁸ Waff, interview, 20 January.

board file. The quantity of the file being assessed would drop from 25 percent to 21 percent.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence to prove that three minutes and ten seconds is the correct amount of time to assess each board file. The percentage of the file assessed does not necessarily correlate to accuracy of assessment. If only 20 percent of the information in a file predicts potential, then there is no need to provide more time than that which is required. However, if the Army knew what information most accurately predicts potential then there would be no need to show the board any other data except that which is relevant.¹⁵⁹ The Army could confirm whether the board is measuring potential, says Major General (Retired) Larry Lust, “we can do this by tracking the promotes over time” and compare performance to what the board identified in OML.¹⁶⁰ If all information is partially relevant to predicting future performance, then intentionally not facilitating time for that assessment will knowingly result in bad data. The bad data translates to promotion results that are not accurate, or merit-based and which provide a disservice to the Army and its Soldiers.

HRC and Branch Managers

The most significant variable in terms of potential costs or savings is also the most difficult to quantify – retention.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Human Dimension Task Force DA Civilian, interview.

¹⁶⁰ Lust, interview.

¹⁶¹ Fleming, “Pilot Specialists,” 5.

Talent Management

Toward the end of chapter 2 the researcher identified a perceived unnecessary cost and inefficiency associated with assignment officers at HRC not being privy to the board results. This requirement is based on regulation, which results in assignment managers having to reevaluate individual files into an order of merit for specialized assignments, nominative positions, opportunities, and assignment allocation. This information was confirmed through interviews with six assignment managers from three different branches who admitted spending “seven and a half to ten hours a week generating OMLs” for a cross-section of officers in his or her branch.¹⁶² Every branch manages OMLs and rank orders officers differently. In some cases, the methods differ within the same branch depending on which assignment officer is doing the assessment.¹⁶³ Each individual assignment officer attempts, to the greatest extent possible, to be fair, just, and equitable in the execution of their duties. Yet, like the promotion board members, every individual has their own definition of fair and what constitutes merit or the “best” and therefore each individual assignment officer uses their own personal technique.¹⁶⁴ Other branches attempt to be very systematic and methodical and attempt to mitigate against bias “through a very standardized process.”¹⁶⁵ In this

¹⁶² Major Assignment Officer 3, interview.

¹⁶³ Major Assignment Officer 1, interview by author, Human Resources Command (HRC), Fort Knox, KY, 23 March 2017.

¹⁶⁴ Major Assignment Officer 2, interview by author, Human Resources Command (HRC), Fort Knox, KY, 23 March 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Major Assignment Officer 3, interview.

section I will review what was gleaned from interviewing the different assignment officers, what their job entails, how it is expected to change with IPPS-A/AIM2, and what will make their jobs more efficient.

The assignment process starts with a letter to units regarding manning. Units ask for filling positions by code (11A, 13A, 16A, etc.) to the branch officer. Not all jobs are validated based on manning guidance from the CSA. Some jobs have a higher priority than others, for instance “active component manning guidance from the CSA may only require eighty-five percent of jobs to be filled one year.”¹⁶⁶ In some instances, an assignment officer may recommend an adjustment which will supersede the CSA’s guidance in order to meet career professional development reasons for an officer as dictated by DA PAM 600-3. The amount of attention, time, and effort required for an assignment manager to notice and address these concerns on behalf of one officer out of thousands is significant.

Regardless of the branch and assignment officer, some things like ambiguity, last minute adjustments, and talent distribution remain similar. Assignment officers try to fit every officer to a requirement within their branch. The lack of knowledge or communication with the DA Secretariat often leaves them not knowing whether an officer will even be promoted prior to the board results being published. An officer getting passed over for promotion can cause a lot of time and adjustments for an assignment officer. It is imperative that all requirements in a location are filled with an

¹⁶⁶ Major Assignment Officer 1, interview.

equitable amount of talent. If the best officers in a year group are all sent to one location, it is not great for those officers because only 49 percent may get a top block.¹⁶⁷

There is a lot that must be balanced when matching all individuals to an identifiable required position. It begins with filling the needs of the Army. Married Army couples program is next in the priority. Consideration goes to the couple's needs based on where they have been and what they want.¹⁶⁸ Army requirement guidance and assignment limitations comes next in the priority. An example of this may be a requirement for someone with Brigade S3 experience at a given assignment.

Administrative constraints, like exceptional Family member program, are integrated next into the decision in order to ensure medical care and resources are able to be provided based on assignment location and service member desires. Next, the assignment officers consider DA Pam 600-3 guidance and component guidance. This focuses heavily on officer career timelines. The individual's personal preference are taken into account along with their skills training, specific branch imperatives, and year group. Lastly, units get a vote in the assignment list and attempt to influence the results through by name requests. Last minute changes, particularly regarding service members with exceptional Family members or married Army couples cause tremendous turmoil and force a lot of extra work to reevaluate who goes where. All of this must be done with continuous assessment

¹⁶⁷ Captain Assignment Officer 1, interview.

¹⁶⁸ Major Assignment Officer 2, interview.

toward ensuring talent distribution. Request for orders are not released until approved by branch chief.¹⁶⁹

In order to balance talent, first one must define it and determine how to measure it. Every assignment officer described different methods for how to do this, some examples include: excel spreadsheets, skills, badges, MACP, assignment history, using an estimate of performance through OERs, and categorizing into (top third, middle third, and bottom third).¹⁷⁰ One assignment officer said that his job includes a constant assessment of officers' talent. His method was to focus almost entirely on key developmental OERs and whether there was a "top block, good write up, and good numeration."¹⁷¹ Historical data on every officer is captured, but not studied due to time constraints. Although it can occasionally shape broadening opportunities for nominative assignment.

One common concern identified in a previous research study and surveys by CASAL is that officers get compared to other officers within their unit rather than other officers across the force.¹⁷² Despite branch managers' best efforts, there is a perception that distribution of talent is not effectively conducted. Between 12,000 and 32,000 man-hours are spent annually recreating or reassessing the results of the board by assignment officers in order to effectively place senior Captains or junior Majors into positions. If

¹⁶⁹ Major Assignment Officer 2, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Captain Assignment Officer 2, interview by author, Human Resources Command (HRC), Fort Knox, KY, 23 March 2017.

¹⁷¹ Major Assignment Officer 3, interview.

¹⁷² Jackson, 53.

branch managers did distribute talent based on board results, rather than guesses as to what the board results are, it would be more effective, save time, money, and the Army would benefit greater because of it. Lack of time was unanimously cited as the largest detractor from effectively evaluating, assigning, and distributing talent.¹⁷³

Nursing branch manages and assesses talent much differently than any other branch. Every year, they hold a panel to assess officers in the branch. The panel is established to mirror as precisely as possible an actual board. The same information is presented to a panel of senior officers from a cross-section of different branches. The time restrictions are the same and the panel occurs in the same room and on the same equipment as promotion boards inside the DA Secretariat. The only difference between this panel and an actual promotion board is that it is funded and coordinated by the nursing branch, which allows the branch manager to use the resulting OML as he or she sees fit. Including, but not limited to selecting officers for broadening opportunities, nominative assignments, assignment selection, and career management.¹⁷⁴ Although, this method is costly and does the exact same thing as a promotion board, Nursing Branch sees it as effective for saving assignment officers time, improving effectiveness and quality of talent management. It could help individuals with situational awareness as to where they stand amongst peers, but the current policy is to not divulge the OML findings with officers. Although they are not required by law to withhold this OML

¹⁷³ Every assignment officer interviewed identified time constraints as one of the leading detractors from talent management.

¹⁷⁴ Colonel Branch Manager, interview by author, Human Resources Command (HRC), Fort Knox, KY, 23 March 2017.

information from dissemination, Nursing Branch chooses to by the direction of their branch leadership. Instead, they divide the officer population up into top third, middle third, and bottom third. Assignment officers are still able to provide some honest feedback based on the results of the panel as to areas for improvement.¹⁷⁵ It is questionable as to whether or not the nursing population are aware of their branch practices.

Expected Changes with IPPS-A and AIM2 Implementation

IPPS-A is an automated talent management tool, geared to holistically assess individuals and place them in the right job based on their knowledge, skills, behaviors, and desires.¹⁷⁶ Ideally, it will be able to collect and store all important information on every Soldier from all of the various databases the Army currently uses. AIM2 is the vehicle by which the Army has decided to match units needs with individual desires while increasing communication with officer personnel management.¹⁷⁷ Collectively, IPPS-A and AIM2 will transform the Army's execution of talent management. These are tremendous tools that have incredible opportunities to advance the efficiency and effectiveness of getting the right person into the right place at the right time.

The officers of HRC with whom the researcher spoke, were positive about the implementation of IPPS-A and AIM2. It provides the officers more visibility and

¹⁷⁵ Colonel Branch Manager, interview.

¹⁷⁶ Shoffner, lecture.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

transparency on all available assignments and provide units with all available movers.¹⁷⁸

AIM2 may assist Branch by helping capture all correspondence between officers and assignment officers including all considerations.¹⁷⁹ Plus, it allows a carryover of history and dialog of officers with HRC, resulting in an increase of situational awareness and contextual understanding to the decision makers.¹⁸⁰ Speaking on the AIM2, an officer in the Nursing branch stated,

It will allow officers to see where they stand amongst their peers. Otherwise, without the benefit of knowing where you are or what the write ups mean, [an individual is unlikely to have a good sense of expectation management]. There may still be a great job which leverages the strength of someone who is in the bottom third, and sometimes you need to have a discussion about retirement.¹⁸¹

It is ironic the branch most capable by law and regulation to provide candid feedback to its officer population is excited about the opportunity for the AIM2 to do that. Similar optimism for the application of IPPS-A and AIM2 were shared by all branch officers interviewed.

How Can Talent Management be Improved?

All branch officers supported the idea that IPPS-A and AIM2 would help aspects of talent management, but they also believed there were still areas needed for improvement, albeit each branch identified something different. There needs to be a better description of the assignment in AIM2 and it ought to be cemented after RFOs are

¹⁷⁸ Captain Assignment Officer 1, interview.

¹⁷⁹ Major Assignment Officer 1, interview.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Colonel Branch Manager, interview.

released. New Majors will receive an RFO that will send them to a Brigade and the G1 or Chief of Staff will adjust it.¹⁸² The same branch also pointed out that expectation management would be greatly improved if officers had an idea as to how many months before a key developmental job opens up by location. Some officer selections are not based off location, but rather on availability of KD positions, leadership, types of sub-units, deployment schedule, regionally aligned missions, and a myriad of other choices. The current AIM2 is mainly tailored toward officers who are strictly focused on location. G1s do have conversation with Branch regarding these points, but they are not always honored.¹⁸³

An officer from a different branch thought the greatest need for improving talent management was through changing the OER. The senior-rater feedback tends to be over-inflated and not candid.¹⁸⁴ Major General (Retired) Larry Lust points out, “There are a lot of people who do not have guts enough to tell other people the hard truth for evaluations.”¹⁸⁵ This is not a new problem in the Army, but it is not getting better. Members of this branch thought OMLs should start at the unit. A list from a senior rater that identifies all officers within their charge from best to worst was recommended.

¹⁸² Major Assignment Officer 2, interview.

¹⁸³ Major Assignment Officer 1, interview.

¹⁸⁴ Major Assignment Officer 3, interview.

¹⁸⁵ Lust, interview.

Another option provided was to let a computer compare a senior rater's comments to individuals.¹⁸⁶ These complaints had relatable similarities with the last branch's concerns.

The last branch focused mostly on time. Having more time available would enable 2100 assessments annually to be slotted more effectively.¹⁸⁷ Whether it is complaints concerning the ambiguity of OERs or the time it takes to make assessments, the underlying issue for both these branches is how the effectiveness of their job is hampered without a standardized OML. Assuming an average of 22,000 hours a year spent recreating the results of the board by Major officers with twelve years of service, equates to \$1.19 million. This does not consider the additional time and money spent on distributing talent at other officer ranks nor does this consider the cost of what Nursing branch does.

Officers from branch were not alone in their support for information sharing. A former member of the Army's Human Dimension Task Force thought the Army should share OML information between G1 and Branch.¹⁸⁸ He also is a strong proponent for linking orders between branch managers and units so that request for orders match final destinations of officers. The researcher was surprised by the clear majority of

¹⁸⁶ Major Assignment Officer 3, interview.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Human Dimension Task Force DA Civilian, interview.

interviewees at all ranks who were supportive and or interested in a pattern analysis, computer-based system capable of predicting and distributing talent.¹⁸⁹

Summary of Talent Management

Talent Management is hampered by current laws and army regulations more so than any other mechanism and until those laws are rescinded or amended, the effectiveness of AIM2 and IPPS-A will not be fully realized. Every branch manager attempts to recreate the careful deliberate work of nine to seventeen Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels on a board which assess and create an OML based on focused deliberation. Each branch assignment officer (with the exception of Nursing Branch) tries to do this for the segment of the branch for which they are responsible (n=1). Secondly, the amount of time spent assessing talent takes away from other potential focus areas like distribution of the talent across all units or ensuring every officer is going to where is best for them and the Army. Lastly, even if the branch managers perfectly distribute talent across the force, Brigade and Division Commanders will adjust assignments based on their slate of incoming officers and where they would most like to see individuals go. Sometimes this causes talent to be stacked in one unit over another.

Computers-Based Tools

If the Army can determine what information is most relevant to assessing potential at a given rank, then it is conceivable that a ranking could be associated with the

¹⁸⁹ Only two individuals interviewed opposed the concept of a computer-based talent management system to predict and place or support the placement of potential using a holistic approach.

data and a computer algorithm could just as easily order all files. A computer algorithm's assessment could be useful in many ways. First, the computer-based order of merit could be compared against board results to determine if, and how well, the board assesses potential (Are we measuring what we claim to measure?). A computer-based tool could be used to simplify the assessment process by providing board members a numerical value to a portion of the board file unseen by the board members, thus dramatically reducing the amount of time and cost of a board. The resulting order of merit could also be adjusted based on needs of the Army and used as the means for promoting individuals by sequence number, thereby promoting based on merit and not by seniority.

The usefulness of the computer algorithm could have many additional purposes such as assessing individual trends over time and identifying when individuals have reached maximum potential. The computer results are a tool. How that tool is implemented is up to senior leaders in the Army. Used effectively, however, it could serve to significantly reduce costs, eliminate cognitive biases, maximize efficiency, perfect accuracy of assessments, and improve overall trust by officers.

Common Concerns and Rebuttals of a Computer-Based Algorithm

There were three common arguments toward the implementation of a computer-based algorithm to leverage talent management, assist in identifying potential, and use to promote officers by merit rather than seniority.

The first concern is that the cost would be too great and will require hundreds of data analysts for years in order to accomplish. Based on the numbers outlined in the preceding chapter, the Army cannot afford not to leverage the power of computer analytics. The assumption that hundreds of data analysts are required to understand what

the computer data means is also false. A good program is user friendly. Once the algorithm is initialized, it will have the opportunity to refine its data every year, making it more capable as a predictive tool. In other words, it will become more effective the longer it is implemented. The cost to develop said tool would be nominal to the money it would save in the long run.

The second main counterargument expressed involved concern that promoting based on merit will disenfranchise the population of officers ranked at or near the bottom of the OML. Publishing the sequence numbers will simultaneously be publishing the board OML results. Individuals with these concerns identified potential fall out when units and leaders gain increased confirmation bias based on the OML. Officers assigned to a new unit will be rank ordered and placed in KD positions based on preconceived notions as to their potential based on the board results. Officers will not arrive with a clean slate.

These negative assumptions of military leaders are not corroborated by any current behaviors. Major General (Retired) Larry Lust disagrees with this perspective and thinks promotions should be based on order of merit. “The vast majority of the Army already thinks they are based on order of merit,” he points out.¹⁹⁰ Yet despite this unawareness, our force does not act according to the assumption that lower performing individuals somehow receive prejudice; “this does not happen. If we actually started putting officers in order based on merit, it would not change anything too much,” except

¹⁹⁰ Lust, interview.

those who are most deserving receive what they earned, greater opportunity.¹⁹¹ What is better? To disenfranchise the low performers or to disenfranchise everyone else? If someone stops performing because they are ranked low amongst their peers, or “has a defeatist attitude, I wouldn’t want them in my unit anyway,” says an anonymous Brigadier General interviewed.”¹⁹²

Self-serving bias tends to hamper leader professional development. Consider that 94 percent of men see themselves in the top fifty percentiles of athletic ability.¹⁹³ Self-awareness is severely hampered by this alarming, yet consistent cognitive bias. Self-awareness is necessary to determine steps for development. Facilitating this knowledge could greatly improve awareness and serve as a driving function for improving professional development opportunities and job satisfaction amongst officers. In Organizational Psychology, satisfaction of employees is defined as perception minus expectation.¹⁹⁴ For this reason, it is imperative to maximize perceptions of fairness on behalf of Soldiers, particularly since expectations tend to rise with rank.

One of two things will happen, either the low ranked individual will work hard to increase efforts and strive to improve his or her standing prior to the next board, or the individual will continue to be a poor performer. In either case, high performing officers

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Brigadier General, interview.

¹⁹³ Carolyn Aiken and Scott Keller, “The Irrational side of Change Management,” *McKinsey Quarterly* (April 2009), accessed 14 May 2017, <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-irrational-side-of-change-management>.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

and mid-level performing officers are not likely to decrease effort based on positive reinforcement. Therefore, there is not a significant threat of diminished work by publishing the results. There is a potential that poor performing officers who are motivated by transactional leadership and have the efficacy and valence to work harder, may increase effort due to the increase instrumentality that comes from a non-biased, merit-based OML.¹⁹⁵

The last concern is related to the previous. There is an assumption that low performing officers will stop performing/ trying because they will no longer see a potential for promotion at the next rank. The decision to stop trying or work harder will directly relate to whether or not the individual has self-efficacy and instrumentality.¹⁹⁶ In other words, do they think that if they put in the effort they can improve and that improvement will be recognized and rewarded. If the individual does not see the system as fair than they will likely not have the instrumentality or will to attempt. Until the system is fair or perceived as equitable, individual motivation will be hampered through negative instrumentality. Unfortunately, it is unlikely for the perception to change without amendments to the current laws.

Chapter Summary

If we truly want to identify the best officers for grooming, nominative positions, special broadening assignments and or if we want to ensure we are most effectively

¹⁹⁵ Victor Vroom, "Summary of Expectancy Theory," Value Based Management.net, 6 January 2016, accessed 12 March 2017, http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/methods_vroom_expectancy_theory.html.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

placing the right person with the right skills and experiences in the right job at the right time, it would be prudent to provide branch managers maximum time to focus on that aspect rather than recreating a product which already exists.

It cannot be overstated that the efforts by the DA Secretariat and board members chosen are well executed and strive to maximize the product given the allotted time. Lieutenant General (Retired) David Huntoon accurately surmises, “everyone who serves as a board member has confidence that the board does select the officers with the greatest potential.”¹⁹⁷ The truth remains, however, that surveys conducted annually by CASAL depict the vast majority of officers as having either low perceptions, too high of expectations, or both. It is this researcher’s belief, based on the data collected, that the fault of the negative responses is not on the board members, or any of the organizations within HRC or under the Army G1. The process itself, as dictated by law and regulation is the largest contributor to inefficiencies, and inaccuracies. That being said, there is an opportunity now with the technological capability of supercomputers to drastically improve effectiveness and more accurately predict potential.

¹⁹⁷ Huntoon, interview.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Consideration of Options

There are three options worthy of discussion with respect to recommendations: leave the promotion evaluation system alone and keep it the way it is, eliminate the OER and change officer personnel management to be strictly seniority based thereby matching our enacted behaviors to new espoused beliefs, or change the laws and process to ensure our actions match our espoused beliefs. This may at first sound like an oversimplification and it is meant to be. However, that does not alone dictate the best answer. Change alone for change sake, would be foolish. Careful analysis of all three options is therefore prudent.

Based on the surveys and research quoted here within, leaving the system the way it is will continue to erode trust and provide negative consequences on those who serve. The Army will continue to promote individuals based on a flawed system with inherent biases. The cost required to take a holistic approach toward promotions and personnel management will be insurmountable and so the Army will continue to atrophy the trust of its leaders for the sake of its homeostatic comfort. It will continue to claim merit-based systems which effectively and holistically consider all elements of the human dimension in assessing officers for assignments and promotions. As funding decreases, boards will necessarily be limited in number and fewer individuals will assess more files with less time as has been the trend over the last two decades.

If that is sufficient in the leadership's eyes, then that is the proper course to take. If, however, it is believed that guidance is necessary to adjust course for changes in the

operational environment; if senior leaders prefer their guidance for boards to be reflected in the results; if the Army wishes to answer the challenge addressed by the Secretary of Defense in 2016; if the Army desires to align espoused beliefs with enacted practices; and / or if the Army wants to ensure it is properly identifying individuals with the greatest amount of potential to receive greater responsibility, then change is required and option two or three must be considered.

Option two does not necessarily have to eliminate the OER. But, if the Army promotes entirely on seniority then defining potential or assessing talent is no longer required. The OER, may actually increase in validity due to not being tied to career progression or advancement. Therefore, the OER would be able to serve to a much greater extent as a leader development tool. Many corporations have recently pursued this course of action. The result would be a considerable loss in effectiveness and motivation. The greatest loss in effort would be experienced by extrinsically motivated officers. The ability to distinguish between performance of individuals would increase based on the accuracy of the OERs and the larger divergence between intrinsically and extrinsically motivated individuals. Those most driven for distinction would lose a common valence for lofty pursuits. This would explain why productivity tended to drop by 10% in corporations which chose this option.

Option three requires that a change be made to the current system of evaluations and promotions starting with amendments to laws governing officer personnel management. Change does not necessarily equate to improvement. The OER has been changed many times, yet every time, officers and senior leaders find reason to complain about its effectiveness as a tool to accurately assess potential. Adding additional blocks to

check, eliminating unnecessary verbiage, or creating limitations on above center of mass are all examples of adjustments meant to improve the boards effectiveness, but these examples will always fail because of the information cited in chapter 2 and they are reliant on the subjectivity of one or two individuals. Considering all senior raters are continually influenced by various cognitive biases and personality conflicts, and the fact that the OER speaks more about the rater than the rated, it is amazing the results of promotions have not been rejected sooner.

The research conducted in chapter 2 and 4 does not concur with eliminating the OER or relying on seniority based models for promotions. There is benefit and significance to an evaluation of performance, the research only identifies that the objectivity and reliability of these reports diminish when used as a tool for assessing potential growth or promotion. The less the Army relies solely on the OER, the more it will bear significance through reliability and accuracy. Therefore, the researcher is not advocating for another change to the OER, but a change to how it is implemented and the weight it carries with respect to promotions.

Hopefully at this point the reader is convinced that change is necessary. The OER is a good tool and does not need to be changed. However, the use of that tool would be more effective if supported or supplemented with some other mechanism for assessing talent, performance and potential. The proposal detailed below was developed systematically throughout the process and was shared with all participants and many more outside participants in order to gain reliability and applicability within the Army. It attempts—to the greatest extent possible—to produce an outcome that answers the

research questions and achieves validation over the ten components identified at the end of chapter 2 which the research deems necessary for successful evaluation of potential.

Consideration for Change

In the Assumptions section of chapter 1 the researcher used an analogy that identifying the greatest potential in the Army is like catching the biggest fish in the lake. The bigger the net that is cast, the greater the likelihood of catching more fish and distinguishing the one that is biggest. Using the current mechanism relies almost entirely on the OER (a very small net) and forces the OER to be less accurate (there are holes in the net and sometimes it is casted in the shallow end). To throw a bigger net, the Army must look at a much larger database of information to evaluate potential. Instead of a handful of criteria, the Army could have the potential to look at hundreds or even thousands of criteria on every individual compared to all other individuals at the same rank and in the same branch. This would necessarily require computer-based algorithms, thereby reducing conscious and subconscious biases.

The greater the number of criteria, the larger the net and consequently, the more expensive it gets to collect the information. The Army, through its many systems, already collects exorbitant amounts of information on all currently serving personnel. Unfortunately, these systems are disjointed and do not communicate with each other to collate the data.¹⁹⁸ However, recent efforts have already begun to address this problem and attempt to consolidate information via IPPS-A.

¹⁹⁸ Waff, interview, 20 January.

The AIM2 project is one such reason this collating of data has already begun, albeit for different reasons.¹⁹⁹ The problem with the AIM2 or IPPS-A programs is that it does not solve the underlying problems according to the research here within. For instance, the E-harmony match proposed by the program still requires an OML for selecting comparable officers of the same caliber. The proposed solution by the Talent Management Task Force is to allow assignment officers to evaluate files and determine an order of merit of their choosing. This is a step in the wrong direction, according to the research. Since there is no basis for comparison, it lacks objectivity; the choice falls on one or a handful of individuals, and biases can flourish without oversight. Furthermore, there is no validation test, to ensure the OML measured what it intended to measure, and the OML created would be based on the numeration from OERs. Hence, nearly all criteria required for a viable option would not be substantiated with the exception that officers would be compared against peers within the same branch and by having self-reporting it would slightly increase the number of criteria assessed. Although, this criteria is not considered for the development of the OML.

¹⁹⁹ Major General Shoffner spoke to a cross-section of CGSOC students on 9 December 2016 to discuss the AIM2 project and how it would feed IPPS-A in a new approach to talent management. According to the Major General, the purpose of this new program is to better manage the military and optimize everyone's talent in order to improve the generation gap, leader development and retention. To accomplish the AIM2 program it was imperative to define what is meant by talent. The Talent Management Task Force decided to define talent as the unique intersection of knowledge, skills, and behavior. It was determined that in order to properly identify where individuals were within this triangle, the Army needed more than the OER. The Talent Management Task Force's AIM2 program solves this dilemma through asking individuals to self-report individual passions and compare these results with the detailed job description of vacant positions. The plan is that using a computer-based "E-Harmony-style" comparison, the Army will be able to assign the right individuals to the right jobs.

The criteria that could be assessed for promotions or OMLs are as numerous as creativity allows. Anything that might be considered as contributing to potential could be included. Examples of what the Army already accounts for include: ACOMs, numeration, APFT pass or fail, and height/weight pass or fail. A computer-based system as described could additionally include the specific score of the APFT, the specific percentage of body fat indicator, Academic Evaluation Reports, undergraduate GPAs as well as post graduate degrees and GPAs, performance in military or civilian schools, awards, evaluations based on assignments, deployments or military experiences, additional skill identifiers, certifications, languages spoken, cultural experiences, mentorship provided and received, a host of branch specific accomplishments and timings, diversity of jobs and results of specific questions on the MSAF or other 360-style tool. It is easy for a board to unconsciously marginalize an officer based on the job title, as Major General (Retired) Larry Lust suggests, “this guy spent two years in Training and Doctrine Command, he is no good. But how many people did that officer influence and in what ways? It is hard to evaluate individuals against their peers across the force.”²⁰⁰ A computer-based assessment could, however. It can also weigh negative criteria such as: Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), civilian violations, and negative counseling statements, malingering. The amount of negative weight would correspond with the infraction committed.

Character, leadership, grit, and intrinsic motivation are some of the most difficult things to measure and can only hope to be done indirectly; however, it is possible to

²⁰⁰ Lust, interview.

attempt this with a comprehensive system. For instance, weighing the performance of former subordinates, identifies the influence of the leader, particularly if there is a pattern. Negative influences tend to create negative progeny. When assessed over great numbers, patterns will start to form. As an example, if 40 percent of a leader's former subordinates leave the Army within two years after serving with him or her, there is a high likelihood that the individual does not inspire subordinates to serve. Particularly when comparing to the average person being assessed who only has 7 percent of former subordinates leaving within two years.²⁰¹ Abnormally greater percentages of successful subordinates with high achievement would likewise have a positive impact on a former leader. More aspects of the OER could be included and weighed against the performance of peers, such as Army values, the rater's numeration and block checks. Furthermore, a negative OER from a leader, later found to be toxic or having immoral, poor character tendencies, can be given less weight or removed completely from one's file.

Once consolidated the data would have to be analyzed. Some criteria could be weighted more heavily than others based on the direction and guidance from leadership. Some criteria could be removed from computer assessment altogether; it would be up to the leadership and guidance as to what is evaluated and by how much. A computer, or a series of computers, which can run twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week would run the algorithm based on the inputs and weighted criteria and rank order all evaluated individuals in an OML based on every specific branch. Identifying those eligible to be

²⁰¹ These percentages are hypothetical and are not specific, but are used as an example of how to differentiate individuals based on patterns and trends compared to averages.

promoted below the zone or above the zone based on the needs of the Army would be supported by strong objective criteria reinforced by standing within the OML. Most importantly, this would allow leadership to determine based on branch, those with the greatest potential. If the Army needs more Engineers in the grade of Major than other branches, this would allow for a quick, easy way to select how many are promoted, from what branches, and at what times. Below the zone and above the zone promotions would be easier to assess and select based on specific, objective criteria that is also transparent to those being promoted.

Once this evaluation system is implemented for several years, it would begin to self-correct, or provide a self-correcting suggestion to the board and Secretary of the Army. It could do this by reassessing officers' performances two and three years following a promotion. Once the officers are reassessed and reranked in order by merit of their performance over those two years, the OML is compared with the initial OML completed prior to the board. A computer would then be able to assess what weights to place on all of the earlier data in order to make the earlier OML most-likely mirror the OMLs at two or three years after the fact. The weighting of the data is thereby correlated with a prediction and can be used on a separate cohort of officers to validate its reliability.

Most likely, the weighting will not be a perfect prediction of the next cohorts' future performance. However, the level of divergence should be smaller and thereby the prediction will be more accurate. The more times this is done, the more times patterns will form with respect to weights of specific data. Some data will eventually be shown to have no correlation to predicting potential, while other data may show to have significant

correlations. This process will help the Army to not only predict potential, but also be able to define it to the thousandths of a decimal place.

By including this new system, officers will know they are no longer being assessed primarily on their OER, but rather on potentially all data points the Army collects. This makes it impossible to game or strategize because one cannot fake motivation and excellence in all things. Every officer must strive to be holistically competent and not worry about spotlighting, but rather focused on personal and professional development. When it appears that other data points are being considered beside the OER, raters and senior raters will perceive and approach writing them differently. According to research, this would cause the evaluations to be written more candidly, accurate, and reflective of reality. The more honest OERs can help remove the self-serving bias and help every individual gain a better understanding of where they are succeeding and failing.

The analysis of what data with what weight predicts potential should not be done separately by branch or Military Occupation Specialty (MOS). Although, there are plenty of reasons and data to suggest that what makes a good Armor officer might not make a good Field Artillery Officer or what makes a Captain effective at being a Strategic Signal Officer is not what will make an effective Tactical Signal Officer. This may be true, but should not be considered. Instead of promoting individuals and then attempting to best assign them to a position where they may or may not thrive, why not identify what positions are available and promote officers most capable to fill each position? By conducting talent management this way, the dog will wag the tail instead of the tail wagging the dog. Therefore, the computer wants to assess what are the data points and

weights of those data points that will most accurately predict maximum performance of an officer at this duty location with this rater or senior rater based on timelines, Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), MACP, unit and individual desires, etc. The computer does this for all locations and assignments and matches all officers with assignments by providing a predictive percentage of performance for each individual. Officers who cannot meet a minimum predictive percentage of performance are those most likely to harm organizations and underperform and either need more time at a lower rank or need to be removed from the Army.

A computer can just as easily compare any group, branch or MOS against another MOS. The computer could suggest, by branch, what criteria should hold the greatest weight in the future and the Army leadership could choose to adjust weightings as necessary. The computer(s) would constantly be reassessing results every year to maintain the greatest possible accuracy in picking the best talent. This self-correcting tool will essentially create a specialized net for every fish in the lake and simultaneously collect, analyze and organize all in a fraction of the time.

By comparing rater's assessments of current performance to past senior rater's assessment of potential, it is possible to discern patterns as to the ability of senior officers to accurately identify potential. This could serve to differentiate senior officers by ability to accurately assess talent. Although, this is outside the scope of the thesis, it could serve to hold leaders accountable as well for over-inflating, ignoring character flaws, or just being bad judges of future potential.

A board would no longer be necessary for this system to work, however, there is potential benefit by having a human element. For instance, a board might need to assess

the results to ensure the OML and or assignments makes sense and meets the needs of the Army. If the OML clearly identifies the five to ten individuals on either side of a promotion cut, a board could take a longer, in-depth look into each of these individual's board files to assess the validity of the computer-based findings. By focusing on a smaller population, the board would be able to spend a far greater amount of time per file. The purpose of the board would be verification of the selection, rather than assessment.

Leveraging the technology of the 21st Century will prove to be necessary once it is proven to be effective. There is a lack of data or proof of other militaries or industries in the civilian sector leveraging technology the way this recommendation suggests. That is why, once implemented, it is foreseeable many corporations and militaries may want to replicate or adopt this example, particularly after it is deemed effective and the cost savings are realized.

Recommended Additional Areas for Research

What are the largest conscious or subconscious biases amongst board members today and are these the same characteristics the Army chooses to mitigate? Without answering this question, the Army is either making a large assumption as to what needs to be mitigated, or is playing lip-service toward bias prevention.

I highly recommend a survey to be conducted of a cross section of Captains, Majors, and Lieutenant Colonels to determine if promoting based on merit will decrease disenfranchisement of otherwise high performing individuals. The survey should also gather information as to the level of satisfaction the individuals have with respect to branch and assignment selection. Gather information identifying perceptions and expectations. Do these officers want to know where they stand amongst their peers?

Are Army nurses aware that their branch assesses talent management differently than other branches? If so, is there a correlation between knowing the assessment process and trust in the system?

What is the average number of words Colonels and General Officers can read in a minute? What is the level of comprehension at that level? Getting an answer to these two questions can greatly impact the expectation of how much information is getting assessed in every board file and directly relates to the accuracy of the holistic assessment.

Promotions are, to the greatest extent possible, identified based on performance and senior rater's assessment of potential. Yet, promotion order is provided based on seniority, commissioning source, birthdate and other arbitrary numbers. In a given year group, the difference between the first person to be promoted and the last (besides money) is an extra one to two OERs at the next higher pay grade. This equates to significant opportunities for future advancement and it also equates to preventing otherwise higher performing officers to be placed in positions best suited for them and to gain credit from those positions. By continuing this practice over time the effect on a given year group has a multiplicative effect after each rank (diverging from merit-based). One hypothesis which should be further studied is: I predict that an individual who is in the top half of his or her cohort because of seniority (not merit) has a greater chance of becoming a Colonel in the Army than an individual in the bottom half of a cohort's seniority. If this hypothesis is accurate, it serves as an indictment on the entire promotion board process.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY/TERMINOLOGY

Potential

DA Pam 600-3 defines potential as the “capability [of an individual] to perform at a specified level of responsibility, authority, or sensitivity.”²⁰² The DA Pam also specifies that the way in which the Army determines potential is through subjective assessments of leaders. This research paper deliberately chooses not to identify a more specific definition of potential for two reasons. First, the researcher does not suggest a better definition exists for the purpose required to the US Army. Secondly, it is the belief that the components of potential or at least the greatest indicators of success are discoverable. There is one caveat however, components of potential may vary by profession or job. Therefore, characteristics which make for a good Infantry Major may not necessarily be the attributes which will lead to success for a good Finance Corps Major. What attributes are more significant by branch and rank are not yet known, nor should it be assumed they are the same or different. The recommended proposals within this research suggest that military leaders could develop a more scientific approach to these assessments and use computer software to identify true potential without bias, thereby identifying the leaders most likely to perform best at the next level of responsibility for any given branch or rank based on historical data.

²⁰² Headquarters, Department of the Army, Pamphlet (PAM) 600-3, 38.

OML

The Order of Merit List is what is published each year identifying who will be promoted and in what order. The order is based on seniority as dictated by law as described in chapter 1 and does not reflect the placement of individuals by merit, which the convening board creates.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RETIRED GENERAL OFFICERS

How did the promotion board calibrate the file -test scoring?

- How much time did it take to calibrate?
- Did you feel that it was a sufficient amount of time?
- Was there a mechanism for dealing with a large disparity between board members on a particular candidate?

What specific information did you get to look at or focus on to make your decision?

- How does (if at all) input from the NMS, Army vision, CSA, impact or affect board evaluation criteria?
- What guidance did you receive? (Procedural and or administrative)
- How much time per board file do you spend reviewing the individual?
- Did you spend less time per board file by the end compared to the beginning? (why?)

Did any other Soldiers or officers know you were on a board?

- Was your identity protected sufficiently?
- How did your assignment to be a board member impact your job?

Do you believe you had the ability to directly impact the promotability of an officer by assigning a number?

- Did you know the cut off of number to a file which meant promoted vs. not promoted?
- Are candidates evaluated separately by branch? Race? Ethnicity? Gender? Other criteria?

Did you take breaks?

- a. How often?
- b. For how long?
- c. What did your schedule look like while you were a board member?
- d. Did you still have work to do for your regular job after the duty day?

How long were you TDY from your job?

Did you evaluate any officers you knew personally?

- e. Did personal knowledge of the individual help or detract from your evaluation?
- f. Did you have concerns that knowledge of some officers might influence your or other board member's decisions?
- g. Why or why not?

Do you feel there may have been any conscious or unconscious biases by any board members?

- If so, what are some possible biases you feel would be most prevalent?

- Do you think the Army used any mitigating factors to prevent these biases?
- If not, why do you believe the Army redistributes promotions by race and gender?
- Do you think it is necessary?

Did you have any complaints from the process or recommendations on how to improve the system? (both then and now after reflection)

APPENDIX C

2017 TALENT MANAGEMENT SURVEY

Carefully Read each question Circle or Write answer where appropriate.

1. Currently OMLs for promotions are based on seniority by time in grade, service, federal service, birth date and reverse social security number order. To what extent do you feel this reflects merit?
 - a. A great extent (I would not change anything)
 - b. Some extent (I like it in principle)
 - c. Undecided (I do not care)
 - d. Somewhat not (It is not a good indicator)
 - e. Not at all (This is a very bad way of identifying order of merit)
2. The current promotion board process depends heavily on numeration and top blocks within individual OERs. To what extent are you satisfied with this method?
 - a. Very Satisfied
 - b. Somewhat satisfied
 - c. Unsatisfied
 - d. Very Unsatisfied
 - e. Undecided
3. Would you prefer promotion selection boards to consider additionally criteria to evaluate you more holistically against your peers?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. What do you think should be evaluated for promotion? Check all that apply

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual preference	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/> Army Values
<input type="checkbox"/> Legal Issues	<input type="checkbox"/> Negative Counselling's	<input type="checkbox"/> OERS
<input type="checkbox"/> APFTs	<input type="checkbox"/> Deployments	<input type="checkbox"/> Awards
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional skill identifiers	<input type="checkbox"/> Military Schools	<input type="checkbox"/> Civilian Education
<input type="checkbox"/> GPAs	<input type="checkbox"/> Online Requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> Health Components
<input type="checkbox"/> Branch specific data pts	<input type="checkbox"/> Military Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Height/ Weight
<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment by peers	<input type="checkbox"/> Branch/ Rank test	<input type="checkbox"/> FRG performance
<input type="checkbox"/> Assessment by mentors	<input type="checkbox"/> Distinguished awards	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation level

- ☐ Performance of subordinates ☐ Assessment by subordinates
- ☐ Performance of individuals previously mentored
- ☐ Poor performance adjusted for hostile work environments
- ☐ Performance in units adjusted for caliber of peers (adjust for 51% center of mass concerns)
- ☐ Others (please specify) _____

5. Should promotion boards be conducted by a board or autonomously through a computer that can assess more criteria than a board?
 - a. Autonomous
 - b. Board
 - c. Both
 - d. I am not sure, I would like to learn more about other options
 - e. I do not care

6. Do you feel Major promotion boards should compare individuals against peers of the same branch or all peers irrespective of branch?
 - a. Assessments should compare officers against peers of the same branch
 - b. Assessments should compare all officers together regardless of branch
 - c. Some branches should be compared together, but others should be separate
 - d. I do not care

7. Would you be in favor of a computer operated objective, merit-based promotion board evaluation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Yes and No
 - d. I am not sure, I would want to know more
 - e. I do not care

8. Should the Order of Merit List be organized in order by merit or seniority?
 - a. Merit
 - b. Seniority
 - c. I do not care
 - d. Other: _____

9. Are you aware of a subordinate, peer or leader who was promoted, but should not have been?

- a. 0 individuals
- b. 1-2 individuals
- c. 3-4 individuals
- d. 5 or more individuals

10. In regards to question 9, Do you believe there was information the board was unaware of or did not consider that would have changed their decision to promote?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. NA

11. If yes, what are some examples of those items?

12. Are you aware of a subordinate, peer, or leader who was not promoted, but should have been?

- a. 0 individuals
- b. 1-2 individuals
- c. 3-4 individuals
- d. 5 or more individuals

13. Do you believe one minor item may have overly contributed to him or her not getting promoted?

- a. Yes example: _____
- b. No explain: _____
- c. I have no idea
- d. NA

14. Your Component/Status

- a. Active Duty
- b. National Guard
- c. Reserve

- d. Retired
- e. Former military (not retired)
- f. DA Civilian
- g. Interagency

15. When do you plan on leaving the Army?/ When would you have liked to get out of the Army?

- a. I plan on retiring before I am eligible for retirement
- b. As soon as I am eligible for retirement
- c. Twenty years of service (take full advantage of retirement)
- d. As long as I can (until the Army tells me to leave)
- e. Other: _____

16. What do you think should be evaluated for assignment selection? Check all that apply

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What the Officer wants | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Intelligence | <input type="checkbox"/> Army Values |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Race | <input type="checkbox"/> Gender | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnicity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Negative Counselling's | <input type="checkbox"/> OERS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> APFTs | <input type="checkbox"/> Deployments | <input type="checkbox"/> Awards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional skill identifiers | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Schools | <input type="checkbox"/> Civilian Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GPAs | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Requirements | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Components |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Branch specific data pts | <input type="checkbox"/> Military Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Height/ Weight |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment by peers | <input type="checkbox"/> Branch/ Rank test | <input type="checkbox"/> FRG performance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment by mentors | <input type="checkbox"/> Distinguished awards | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivation level |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performance of subordinates | <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment by subordinates | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performance of individuals previously mentored | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor performance adjusted for hostile work environments | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performance in units adjusted for caliber of peers (adjust for 51% center of mass concerns) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) _____ | | |

17. The new AIM2 offers a computer-based system which attempts to best match needs of the Army with skills, knowledge, and talent. How comfortable are you with a computer system able to provide this match?
- a. Very comfortable (I have confidence in a computer-based system)
 - b. Somewhat comfortable (I have some doubts)
 - c. Somewhat uneasy (I have considerable doubts)
 - d. Not at all comfortable (I have no confidence in a computer-based system)
 - e. Undecided (I do not care)
18. When the AIM2 suggests more individuals to a location than required slots, the branch officer must determine based on an individual assessment, which candidates are best deserving of what assignment. To what extent do you feel this is acceptable?
- a. A great extent (I am confident that my branch manager will do what is best)
 - b. Some extent (I like it, but I have some doubts)
 - c. Somewhat disagree (I would prefer more oversight over the branch manager)
 - d. Not at all (There should be a definitive, merit-based approach toward who gets what assignments)
 - e. Undecided (I do not care)

A. What is your Branch/ MOS (pull-down)

B. What is your rank? (pull-down)

C. What is your race? Pick all that apply

D. What is your Year Group

E. What is your Ethnicity? Pick all that apply

F. What is your gender?

G. What is your age? (pull-down)

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS FOR THE DA SECRETARIAT AND HRC

How does the promotion board calibrate?

- How much time does it take to calibrate?
- How many board members are on an average board? How is the number determined?
- Do all board members evaluate every candidate's file at the same time?
- Do all board members evaluate all candidates?
- Are there any planned changes to any of these questions for the future?

How does a candidate's file get prepared for the board?

- What are the required tasks prior to the board convening to facilitate the board process?
- What do the board members see in a file?
- Who does these tasks and how long does it take?
- How is it determined what candidates from a previous year group will be evaluated?
- What guidance is given to the board members? (Procedural and administrative)
- How much time is expected for each file to get looked at?

Who sits on a board?

- How are board members selected?
- How are their identities protected?
- Are board members flown TDY to location?
- How does the board impact board-members' jobs?
- How is the board process paid for?
- Should this be done better or differently?
- What is the average cost of this process in a given board?
- How many boards occur in a given year?

How does the rating of the file work?

- What does the rating scheme look like?
- What percentage of files received a 1? 2? Etc.
- What is the purpose of that scheme? 3-6 get promoted?
- How do the ratings translate to final product?
- Are candidates evaluated separately by branch? Race? Ethnicity? Gender? Other criteria? How and when does this happen?
- How long has the current system (evaluating officers by a panel) been taking place?

Are AARs conducted?

- If so, are they collocated anywhere?
- Can I get a copy?

- Are there any common complaints by the board members?
- Have you heard of ideas or have ideas on how to improve the system?
- Has there been any recent discussions of changes to the process? (what, when, whom)
- Will those recommendations be considered? (Is that good?)

Are board members required to take breaks?

- How often?
- For how long?
- Who manages this?
- What does an average day look like (schedule)?

Are there proctors/ supervisors to the board?

- If so, how many people are involved?
- Are there restrictions placed on the board members with respect to communicating with each other or outside individuals?
- How are these restrictions enforced?

How many days does the average board convene for?

- Is there a required minimum/ maximum time?
- What is the longest a board has been convened for?

Are there any mechanisms to prevent board members from evaluating someone he or she knows?

- If so, what are they?
- If not, what is the thought process? Are there concerns of biases?

How do the results deal with who gets promoted if more than a handful of individuals have the same average from the board and only one cannot get promoted?

Are there any considerations of conscious or unconscious biases?

- What biases are considered?
- How does the Army attempt to mitigate these biases?

Do you have any additional recommendations on how to improve the process for evaluation of potential?

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